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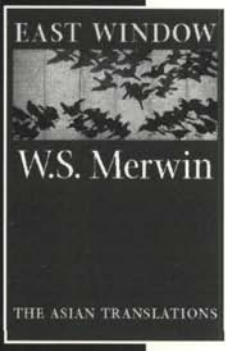

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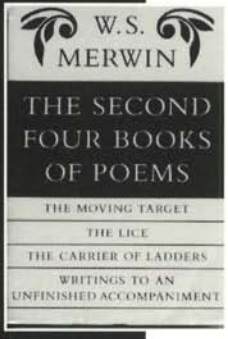

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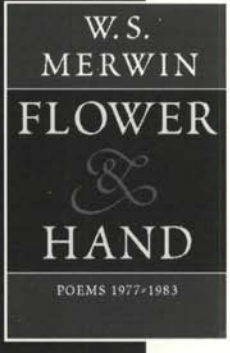

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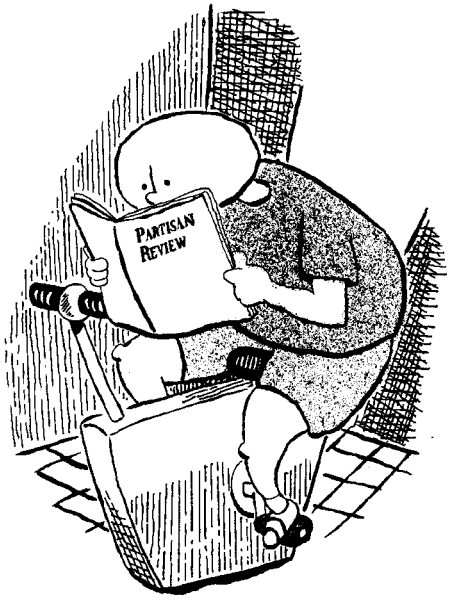

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The following poems are from *The Collected Poems* by Czeslaw Milosz: "A Magic Mountain." Translated by Czeslaw Milosz and Lillian Vallee. "What Once Was Great," "Dedication," "Pictures," and "The Sun." Translated by Czeslaw Milosz. "Rivers" and "Bypassing Rue Descartes." Translated by Renata Gorczynski and Robert Hass. "Mittelbergheim." Translated by Czeslaw Milosz and Richard Lourie. "A Song on the End of the World." Translated by Anthony Milosz. Copyright © 1988 by Czeslaw Milosz Royalties, Inc. "Capri" from *Facing the River* by Czeslaw Milosz. Translated by Czeslaw Milosz and Robert Hass. Copyright © 1995 by Czeslaw Milosz Royalties, Inc. Reprinted by permission of The Ecco Press.

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Erratum: In the Fall 1998 issue, it should have been noted that Andrey Platonov's "Chevengur," translated by Robert and Elizabeth Chandler, is not a self-contained short story but consists of the opening pages of Platonov's novel by the same name.

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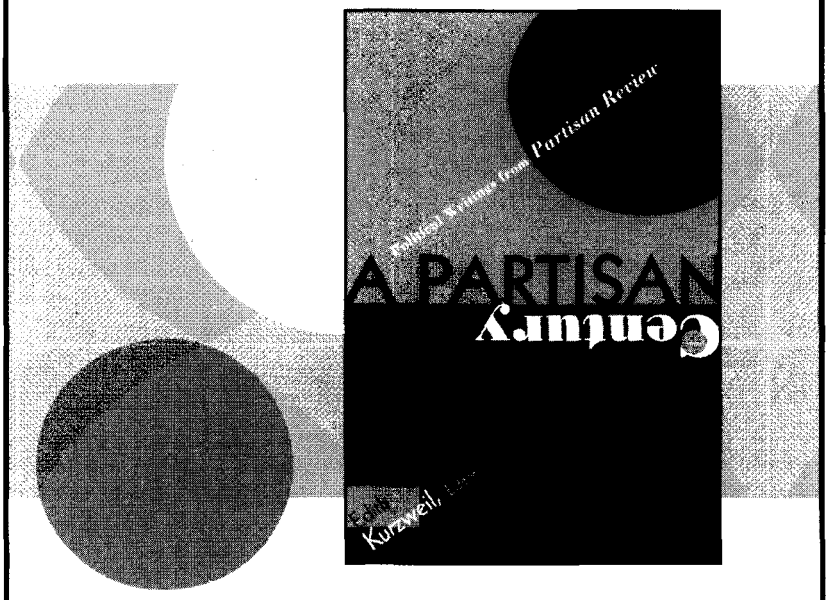

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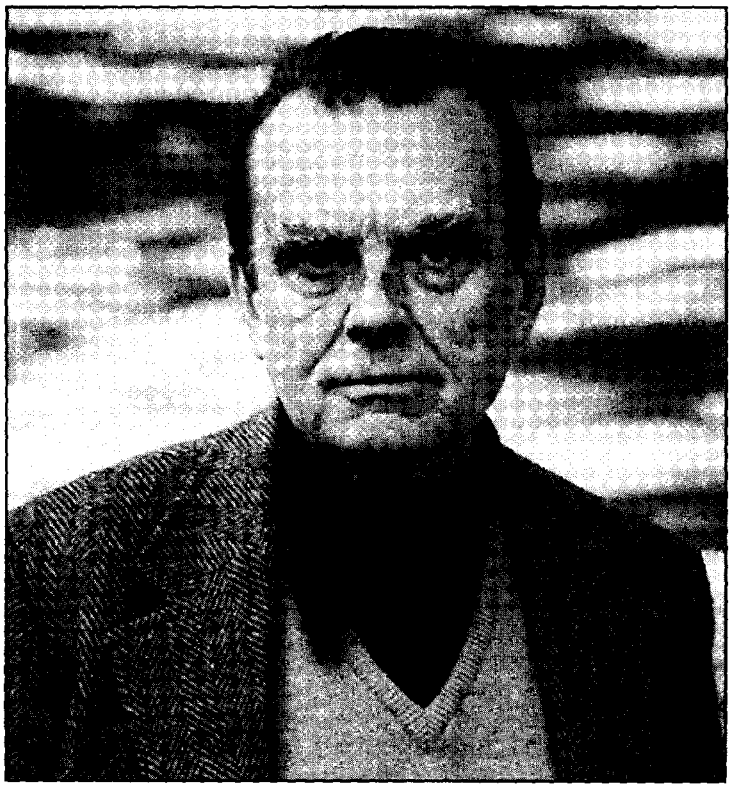

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COMMENT

Finkielkraut's *The Future of a Negation* is an analysis in depth of the perverse denials of the existence of the Holocaust. He analyses the career of Faurisson and others, including some Americans, who designed elaborate explanations for the denial that the Holocaust existed.

Only one other such denial has come to mind—the denial of the gulag in the Soviet Union. The motives for this negation are obvious: the friends of the Soviet Union and the Soviet Union itself did not wish the existence of the gulag to be known because it violated the ostensible precepts of the regime. But the negation of the Holocaust by the Nazi apologists is less simple to understand, for the Nazis were quite explicit in their denunciation of the Jews and of the necessity for their obliteration. *Mein Kampf* itself was a torrent of abuse of the Jews.

To put a better face on the Nazi regime is, I suppose, quite natural for Nazi sympathizers, but it does seem a bit hopeless to sanctify the Nazis by denying that the Holocaust took place. Hannah Arendt pointed out in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that the Nazis placed a high priority on the extermination of the Jews, to the point of using valuable wartime railroad facilities for that purpose. However, to understand Nazi secrecy about the Holocaust itself, I think we have to realize that it was to a great extent a wartime strategy, for the Nazis did not want to alienate further or arouse the hostility of the people in the West.

Finkielkraut's book is a splendid analysis of a morbid Faurisson phenomenon, and a shameful Soviet denial. But there is one flaw. The language is quite abstruse and heavy—in both the original and the translation.

WP

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Most of this issue consists of essays and poems presented during a memorable event, the International Czeslaw Milosz Festival, which took place at Claremont-McKenna College in Claremont, California, April 24-27, 1998. American and Polish poets—Catholic and Jewish—and students from around the world united to celebrate and exchange ideas, and to hear wonderful poetry.

Unfortunately, we had to omit presentations by Jonathan Aaron, Arista Maria Cirtautas, Linda Gregg, Robert Hass, Leonard Nathan, and Lillian Vallee, and poetry readings by Linda Gregg, Jane Hirshfield, Steve Kowit, Bronislaw Maj, Leonard Nathan, and Al Zolynas; were not given permission to print many of the poems that were read; and had to shorten a number of papers and poems throughout. Also, abbreviations are due to lack of space and to avoid repeating what previous speakers had said. However, the interested reader can find the complete poems in the books mentioned. The contributors to this issue are identified in the text.

I want to thank all the participants for their understanding of an editor's problems; special thanks to Tony Milosz, who provided simultaneous translations, and to Lillian Vallee, who translated the original papers by Jan Blonski, Alexander Fiut, Jerzy Illg, Wojciech Karpinski, and Bronislaw Maj. Thanks also to Bonnie Snortum, Director of the Marian Miner Cook Athenaeum where the Festival was held, and to John Baarsh and Ryan Winters, Claremont-McKenna students who provided introductions. I especially thank Robert Faggen, Chair of the Department of Literature at Claremont-McKenna, for having made this event possible. And thanks to Czeslaw Milosz for being, and for being there.

EK

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International Czeslaw Milosz Festival

Introduction; An Invisible Rope: Milosz's Underground Publications

Robert Faggen: Welcome to the International Milosz Festival. In 1871, Walt Whitman published a poem as part of his *Leaves of Grass* entitled "Sparkles from the Wheel," which is included in the section "Autumn Rivulets." I would like to take a moment to read it to you because it is somewhat emblematic of the endeavor on which we are embarked today. "Sparkles from the Wheel."

Where the city's ceaseless crowd moves on the livelong day,
Withdrawn I join a group of children watching, I pause aside
with them.

By the curb toward the edge of the flagging,
A knife-grinder works at his wheel sharpening a great knife,
Bending over he carefully holds it to the stone, by foot and
knee,
With measur'd tread he turns rapidly, as he presses with light
but firm hand,
Forth issue then in copious golden jets,
Sparkles from the wheel.

The scene and all its belongings, how they seize and affect me,
The sad sharp-chinn'd old man with worn clothes and broad
shoulder-band of leather,
Myself effusing and fluid, a phantom curiously floating, now
here absorb'd and arrested,
The group, (an unminded point set in a vast surrounding)
The attentive, quiet children, the loud, proud, restive base of
the streets,
The low hoarse purr of the whirling stone, the light-press'd
blade,
Diffusing, dropping, sideways-darting, in tiny showers of gold,
Sparkles from the wheel.

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I have read not from a collection of Whitman's poems but from a collection of poems by Czeslaw Milosz, published over a hundred years later, entitled *Unattainable Earth.* It underscores Milosz's own fulfillment of Whitman's prophetic sense of himself, namely that he contains multitudes. Milosz's multitudes are a veritable polyphony of contradictory voices. The speaker accomplishes what Milosz achieves so well, a recognition of the universal in the particular, often unnoticed except by those who, like the poet, would become as little children—who both participate in the world and detach themselves from it. Transcendence occurs in the tension of the two movements. As in Blake, the poet is able to see the world in a grain of sand. The world of the grindstone and of the grinder is also that of the creator, a demiurge making both beauty and waste while sharpening what may be either a tool or a weapon. Surely Czeslaw Milosz has been a participant and an observer of the beauty and terror of the demiurge at work—and, with passion and detachment, has always been able to glorify things because they are. For the next three and a half days, we will witness Czeslaw Milosz's poetry even as we discover the way his poetry has witnessed us.

To begin with, Jerzy Illg will talk on "An Invisible Rope: Milosz's Underground Publications," some of which are exhibited, along with photographs and books, in the Honnold Library across the street. Jerzy Illg taught Polish literature at the Silesan University until he was banned, and then became the editor-in-chief of the publishing house Znak. But first, Czeslaw Milosz will read his poem, "A Magic Mountain."

Czeslaw Milosz: "A Magic Mountain."

I don't remember exactly when Budberg died, it was either two
years ago or three.
The same with Chen. Whether last year or the one before.
Soon after our arrival, Budberg, gently pensive,
Said that in the beginning it is hard to get accustomed,
For here there is no spring or summer, no winter or fall.

"I kept dreaming of snow and birch forests.
Where so little changes you hardly notice how time goes by.
This is, you will see, a magic mountain."

Budberg: a familiar name in my childhood.
They were prominent in our region,
This Russian family, descendants of German Balts.
I read none of his works, too specialized.

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And Chen, I have heard, was an exquisite poet,
Which I must take on faith, for he wrote in Chinese.

Sultry Octobers, cool Julys, trees blossom in February.
Here the nuptial flight of hummingbirds does not forecast spring.
Only the faithful maple sheds its leaves every year.
For no reason, its ancestors simply learned it that way.

I sensed Budberg was right and I rebelled.
So I won't have power, won't save the world?
Fame will pass me by, no tiara, no crown?
Did I then train myself, myself the Unique,
To compose stanzas for gulls and sea haze,
To listen to the foghorns blaring down below?

Until it passed. What passed? Life.
Now I am not ashamed of my defeat.
One murky island with its barking seals
Or a parched desert is enough
To make us say: yes, *oui, si.*
"Even asleep we partake in the becoming of the world."
Endurance comes only from enduring.
With a flick of the wrist I fashioned an invisible rope,
And climbed it and it held me.

What a procession! *Quelles délices!*
What caps and hooded gowns!
Most respected Professor Budberg,
Most distinguished Professor Chen,
Wrong Honorable Professor Milosz
Who wrote poems in some unheard-of tongue.
Who will count them anyway. And here sunlight.
So that the flames of their tall candles fade.
And how many generations of hummingbirds keep them company
As they walk on. Across the magic mountain.
And the fog from the ocean is cool, for once again it is July.

Jerzy Illg: The dramatic and moving confession in "The Magic Mountain" contains the destiny of the proud poet—his voluntary exile, his conviction about his vocation and its futility, the awareness that he will not be able to "save the world," the bitterness of loneliness, his loyalty to himself, and his persistence in climbing the "invisible rope" thrown by himself. But I cannot

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agree that he was defeated, since almost every award the world offers a poet has been given to Milosz. Time proved him wrong. Today, Czeslaw Milosz is surrounded by pupils, admirers, readers, and good friends, who have come to talk about him and to listen to his poems once more because, as man and artist, he was victorious. Only he knows the price he paid for that victory. Let's rejoice at the magnitude and the fruits of that victory, keep reading his beautiful poems and wise essays, and move beyond the limits of our own imaginations.

For thirty long years, Milosz was deprived of what a writer most values: participation in the literary life of his homeland and speaking directly to readers in his native tongue. But his stubbornness and perseverence were rewarded because he did not remain completely isolated in his struggle—there were people who cast an invisible rope between him and his Polish readers. Thanks to émigré and underground publishers, to printers and distributors, Milosz's work made its way to readers in Poland. Thereby, it could outlast censorship and force, secret police and customs officials, servile critics, and all the other helpers of nothingness.

His thirty-year absence in the official literature of his homeland was the consequence of a conscious—and excruciating—decision Milosz made in 1951. At that time he was well known in literary circles and to the reading public in Poland for his pre-war volumes, *Poem on Frozen Time, Three Winters*, and *Rescue*—the most important volume of poetry to appear in Poland right after the war.

After five years (1945-1950) in New York and Washington as a diplomat for the People's Republic of Poland, he gave up all privileges Communist countries accorded to writers as "engineers of souls." His correspondence from that period allows us to trace the successive levels of disenchantment with the new regime and its cultural politics. Milosz was unable to publish the anthology of English and American poetry he had assembled in Poland; the authorities demanded such absurd changes in the screenplay of *Robinson Crusoe in Warsaw*, which he wrote together with Jerzy Andrzejewski, that Milosz demanded the removal of his name from the film. It became increasingly difficult to get his poems and translations into print in Polish journals. As censorship stiffened and demands for writers to adhere to socialist realist formulas grew more ruthless, the price of compromise became too steep. After a visit to Poland at the end of 1950, Milosz no longer had any illusions. When he left for Paris, he was still a secretary at the Polish Embassy, but soon took refuge at the headquarters of the Polish émigré Literary Institute (Institut Littéraire) in Maisons-Lafitte near Paris.

This spectacular break unleashed a furious propaganda campaign against him in Poland and a long-lasting campaign against him by many in the Polish émigré community—because he did not repent for "serving a

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criminal regime." For propagandists in Poland he was a "traitor" and a "deserter" who had sold himself to power-brokers of various ilk, including neo-Nazis; to the "unreconciled" in London, he was now accused of being a subversive "cryptocommunist" and agent of the regime. At that time, French intellectuals were intoxicated with leftist ideologies, and for them Milosz was a "renegade" dishonoring a "progressive system," and thus someone unclean. This should give us some sense of the strength a man would need to decide to fight for his own truth. The first gesture to create the invisible rope, the attempt to liberate himself from the shackles of an enslaving ideology and to describe its mechanisms, was *The Captive Mind*, which was translated into countless languages and still serves as a weapon against ideologies that incorporate moral and mental enslavement.

After the enthusiastic reception of the book, Milosz could have set himself up as the expert in captive minds, specializing in Soviet area studies and political science, giving lectures at various universities, and so on. He avoided this temptation and devoted himself to, as he put it, "the senseless task that is writing in Polish while looking out over San Francisco Bay." Elsewhere, he has compared this to hiding words in tree hollows—without any assurance that they would one day be found, read, or understood.

From the very beginning of his life in exile, Milosz found support among the staff of the Parisian monthly *Kultura*. Jerzy Giedroyc, Jozef Czapski, and Zofia and Zygmunt Hertz were unswerving supporters even when their views on certain issues differed. This was the only émigré center on which he could always count and which did not hesitate in defending him, thereby risking tension within the remainder of the émigré community. For years *Kultura* alone published Milosz's poems, essays, and articles, while the first editions of all of his books were published in *Kultura*'s Library Series. The contribution of this center to the cultural and intellectual life of Poles is impossible to overestimate.

For many years Milosz was regarded as a "non-person," although, owing to the October thaw of 1956, Jan Blonski and Jerzy Kwiatkowski did manage to publish a few critical studies of Milosz's work. But the work itself was still unavailable. Silence surrounded his work and was scrupulously maintained until Milosz received the Nobel Prize in 1980. However, single copies of Milosz's books, published in Paris, made it through censors and customs, were retyped in parts or in their entirety, sometimes even hand-copied, and then passed on from hand to hand—often at great personal risk. Of course, the circulation was relatively small.

In the mid-seventies, the democratic opposition and the underground press were born. An avalanche of leaflets, newspapers, pamphlets, informational bulletins, serious political and socio-cultural and literary journals, and books—by Polish as well as foreign authors—began to appear. At first these works were copied on a typewriter; then on simple printing

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machines. Later, silkscreens were used and finally small offset presses were smuggled across the border. Or the texts were printed "on the sly"—in a state print shop, either during or after work hours.

The market for independent publishers grew at an amazing rate. From September 1976 to August 1980, thirty-five presses put out around five hundred books and pamphlets and around two hundred journals. From August 1980 to December 1981, from the strikes in the Gdansk shipyards and the rise of Solidarity to the imposition of martial law, about two hundred presses and publishing sites produced over twenty-five hundred bound copies and thirty-two hundred titles of journals and bulletins.

The imposition of martial law did not stop the raging river of words nor the democratic aspirations of Polish society. This was a blow to the underground current of independent presses; in the parliamentary session of March 22, 1983, the Minister of Internal Affairs noted that, during the eleven months of martial law, the security forces had confiscated 1,310 presses. Despite the major losses in equipment and internment of those linked to independent presses, publishing efforts went even more deeply underground and became even more impressive (for example, the popular *Tygodnik Mazowsze* had reached a circulation of fifty thousand copies). Between 1982 and 1985 alone, there were 834 publishers and printers.

After the imposition of martial law, about five thousand books and pamphlets were published and close to fourteen hundred journals, a record in countries under Communist rule. In addition, countless copies of poems and songs, wall calendars and posters, and underground postal services (special issue stamps, date-stamps, and postcards) were produced in prisons and internment camps. Given the dimensions of this phenomenon, the regime could not have won its war against the people. We were dealing with a real "paper revolution," which transformed the totalitarian system into a normal democratic state without bloodshed. At this point, the émigré, clandestine, and official literatures again became one.

Milosz's books were the ones most frequently published in the underground, and his poems were copied onto cassette tapes. As Miroslaw Adam Supruniuk states, the independent presses had "by the end of 1981 published everything that Milosz had written after the war (with the exception of *The Issa Valley*, which appeared officially)." During the Solidarity period every independent publisher tried to publish Milosz's poems, especially after he received the Nobel Prize. Some of the titles appeared many times over in various presses. Most printings of *The Captive Mind*, for example, were "wild" editions—unmarked with a press label and most likely printed for profit and sold at high prices. A complete description of this phenomenon is still impossible, even though a few of the larger libraries—the National Library and the Jagiellonian—are collecting underground publications. The

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Bibliography of Reprints from the Literary Institute in Paris lists 153 book editions of Milosz alone for the years 1977-1990. Numerous bibliographical works regularly update this documentation. We know that, next to *The Captive Mind* (26 reprints), various selections of Milosz's poems (27 reprints) were most popular. Then came *City Without a Name* (12), *Native Realm* (10), *Treatise on Poetry and Treatise on Morality* (9), and *From the Rising of the Sun* (9). In reading the poems, people were convinced that they were reading the greatest living poet. NOWa, the oldest and most important of Polish underground publishers, first published a one-volume edition of "Treatise on Poetry" and "Treatise on Morality" in 1978. Milosz cast that invisible rope from his isolation on Grizzly Peak to Polish students, intellectuals, and even workers scrambling for the sometimes almost unreadable but priceless editions of his poems. He remembered the people who enabled him to reach his most important public. He expressed his gratitude by inviting his publishers—from Paris as well as from Warsaw—to the celebrations in Stockholm and he dedicated a part of his acceptance speech to them.

Polish society accepted the Nobel Prize with joyful surprise as the second miracle after the election of the Polish Pope. The birth of Solidarity occurred simultaneously but had nothing to do with them, although Communist propaganda tried to make everyone believe it was the result of a plot aimed at socialism. Many people now heard of Milosz for the first time. The triumph of the poet radically changed his relation to readers in his homeland and thus turned him into a national bard, prophet, oracle, and conscience of the nation.

Milosz's poem "You Who Wronged" became the hymn of Poles oppressed for decades; it was reprinted on Solidarity flyers, posters, calendars, and pennants, and inscribed on the base of the Monument to Fallen Shipyard Workers (killed during the protests in 1970) in Gdansk. When Milosz brought flowers to place on the monument, which bears a fragment from a psalm in Milosz's translation, "The Lord will give strength unto his people," he was greeted by an enormous banner with the words, "The People Will Give Strength Unto Their Poet," and the shipyard print shop published a selection of Milosz's poems and essays under the same title.

The first book officially published in Poland after the Nobel Prize, *From the Rising of the Sun* (1980), was published by Znak in Krakow. In the year 1981, PIW, Warsaw's publishing house, put out a small volume of *Selected Poems*, Czytelnik published an enormous *Poems*, and Wydawnictwo Literackie published *The Issa Valley* in an edition of one hundred thousand. In the years that followed came *Land of Ulro*, *The Man Among Scorpions*, *Hymn of the Pearl*, and other works. Because certain titles, such as *The Captive Mind* and *The Seizure of Power*, made party operatives choke, and others, such as Czytelnik's edition of *Witness to Poetry*, were so badly mangled by censorship, "the complete" Milosz was simultaneously appearing

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in the independent presses. As members of the underground publishing house Krog have testified, in 1981 they were able to publish Milosz's *Collected Poems* six months earlier than the state publishing houses could.

In the late eighties and early nineties, there was a change in the way Milosz's books were published: at first in the Literary Institute's editions and then in Poland. Later, his books appeared in Znak almost at the same time as in Paris. This was the case for *Chronicles*, published in Paris in 1987 and in Krakow less than a year later, and with *A Year of the Hunter* (Paris 1990, Krakow 1991). The breakthrough book was *Provinces* (1991); on the cover of the Krakow edition is the following statement: "Initially this book was to have been published by the Literary Institute in Paris, which has graciously granted Znak rights to the first edition." Now, it was possible to publish almost all books in Poland, and the Literary Institute gradually limited its activities to both of its journals, *Kultura* and *Historical Notebooks*. The first edition of Milosz's next book appeared exclusively from Znak. Was it a coincidence that its title was *Searching for the Homeland*? The new and beautiful Milosz books appearing in Poland these past few years, including last year's best-selling *Road-side Dog*, prove that, after many years of difficult searching, he has indeed been able to find his homeland. The invisible rope leading him there turned out to be sufficiently strong.

Robert Faggen: Now, Jerzy will entertain questions from the audience.

Audience member: Were there so many underground publications because they were a market success? This was commercial publishing in a certain way.

Jerzy Illg: Publishing in the underground was a social service and a duty by people who felt this kind of responsibility. But it also was good business: the books sold out immediately, and there always were more readers than books, so some people may have done these things to do business.

Audience member: How were they distributed?

Jerzy Illg: It's a secret. By volunteers, by students, by members of the printing houses who at the same time distributed, sold, and edited. It worked best in university circles but also in factories, to members of Solidarity. In the underground society people trusted each other. During the official existence of Solidarity between the strike in the Gdansk shipyards and martial law, the underground press rose to the surface and worked almost legally. The secret service didn't stop the persecutions that took place earlier, before the Gdansk strike and after martial law.

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Adam Michnik: I was part of the underground publishing house that first printed Czeslaw Miłosz. It was not a financial undertaking.

Jerzy Illg: Because you worked for the wrong company!

Adam Michnik: All one could earn were several weeks of prison. I'm saying several weeks and not several years, because at that time the dictatorship in Poland was, paraphrasing this in Spanish, not a *dicta dura* but a *dicta blanda*. There was some room between the penal code and the decision of the sentencer, and the underground publishing houses fit into this grace period between the two. Also, underground publishing was trying to turn the opposition in Parliament into a culture. I remember when I once was arrested the police found a box of treatises by Milosz in my apartment. And during the interrogation the officer was saying, "Mr. Michnik, do you believe that with the help of this little poetry you are going to win against Communism?" And we won.

Jerzy Illg: I hope, Adam Michnik, that you will use your experience with a surprise we've got: we have prepared some equipment of a Polish underground press and each guest of the festival can print a souvenir poster in the way we did in the underground. I hope Adam will help the beginners.

Robert Faggen: Please join me in thanking Jerzy Illg.

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MILOSZ AND WORLD POETRY

Robert Faggen: **Seamus Heaney**'s writing combines lyricism and vision. He transports us from the deep earth of the past to the ethical commitments of love and need in the present and the future. His most recent collections of poems include *The Spirit Level*, and his essays include the collection, *The Government of the Tongue,* and his Nobel Prize lecture, *Crediting Poetry*. **Edward Hirsch** is the author of several volumes of poetry, including *Earthly Measures, The Night Parade*, and *Wild Gratitude*. His work describes the plight of the modern Orpheus, awakening to the depths of his own voice. **Tomas Venclova**, Lithuanian-born poet, essayist, scholar, translator, and critic, most recently wrote a biography of poet Aleksander Wat and a collection of poems entitled *Winter Dialogue*. In the words of the late Joseph Brodsky, "Venclova's song starts at the point where the voice usually breaks, at the end of exhalation, when all inner voices are used up." And he added, "Whether his language is called Lithuanian or universal is irrelevant. For Tomas Venclova the two categories are one and the same." **Adam Zagajewski** lives in Paris and teaches part of the year at the University of Houston. One of Poland's most distinguished poets and essayists, he is, according to Edward Hirsch, "a poet of profound dualisms," and of a powerful dialectic between poetry and imagination, history and philosophy, the temporal and the eternal. His most recent collection of poems is entitled *Mysticism for Beginners*. He has also published numerous essays, including the collection *Two Cities*. Seamus Heaney.

Seamus Heaney: Thank you. The alphabet in general has been kind to poets filed under H. Hesiod, Homer, Horace, Herberts of various sorts, Hardy, Heine, Hopkins, Hass, Hirsch. I'm not complaining about being an H, but the luck of the draw did place me first, and that creates a certain anxiety. But it also gladdens me to be the one who starts the celebration. This is a moment of *sursum corda* and of *gratias agimus tibi, Czeslaw*!

In Ireland, you still hear nostalgic talk about the Celts and their various European haunts and homelands, far away and long ago by the Danube; or closer and more recently, in Caesar's Gaul, in the Rhone valley; or at the northern limit of Roman Britain, among the conscripted legions stationed on Hadrian's Wall. A few years ago, for example, I myself felt far away and long ago when I stood in the rushy corner of a field beside the old Roman camp on Hadrian's Wall at Bird Oswald in Northumberland. This scraggy patch of wetland brought me back to all the old damp nowheres I had known on the farm where I grew up, places bathed from the start in what William Wordsworth once called a "visionary dreariness," lonely sites where I had definite experience but never quite knew what it meant. And then near Bird Oswald one meaning was revealed. The guidebook told me I was standing on ground sacred to the Romano-Celtic goddess Coventina, she who is represented over and over again on the many votive panels and little altars found

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in and around the location, holding a waterweed in her right hand and in her left a pitcher from which a river flows and flows and flows unstoppably. Suddenly, it was as if the Irish Catholic child of the 1940s recognized that from the start he had been in possession of a Romano-Celtic soul; standing on that ordinary ground, I was happy to know myself as the anthropological son of the goddess Coventina and the Christian missionary Patricius. A part of me that had been out of it felt for a moment totally included. It was as if I had been taken up to a high mountain and shown all the kingdoms of the world and saw at the center of them a far-seeing child in the puddly corner of a field. I saw that I belonged in and beyond myself, that inside me and outside me there was world enough and time.

Meanwhile, at the very moment when that child was standing big-eyed and dumbfounded in the grey weather of rural Ulster in 1942 or 1943, the world was coming back quiet and clear and far and wide to a poet in Nazi-occupied Warsaw, a poet who would soon be claiming with justifiable confidence that "One clear stanza can take more weight / Than a whole wagon of elaborate prose." His confidence in the pivotal importance of the clear stanza could well have sprung from a poem called "The World" which he was then writing, a poem he would call "Naive" because of its visionary radiance, its Ptolemaic harmony and beauty. One section of it was called "From the Window" and went like this:

> Beyond a field, a wood and a second field,
> The expanse of water, a white mirror, glitters.
> And the golden lowland of the earth
> Bathes in the sea, a half-sunken tulip. [. . .]

This poem is binocular, seeing things from the top of the high mountain and from the back of the child's eye. It is as if the Virgil who envisaged the panorama on Aeneas's shield, those ordeals of war and catastrophe that would eventually lead to the Pax Romana, as if this tragic eye were joined and turned and trained along with another eye on another scene; it is as if some of our wishful thinking Irish commentators were right and Virgil were indeed a man of Celtic stock, a farm boy from Mantua who here suddenly declared his independence of the realities of history and power and revealed instead his native dream of *tír-na-n-óg*, his land of youth, reimagined now deliberately and ruefully from the perspective of Augustus's imperial court. As if, indeed, Milosz were repeating the poetic strategy of Virgil's *Eclogues*, in which the Roman poet sees the hard social and political realities of Augustus's Italy through eyes that had once opened innocently on the childhood world of his father's farm.

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This may seem an unduly sumptuous wagonful of prose in response to those clear stanzas, but reading Milosz gives you the sensation of inhabiting an unbounded region and prompts the search for a correspondingly ample language of commentary. Yet the Virgil analogy is, I believe, more than an ornate compliment. I don't mean to suggest by it that Milosz could ever be thought of as an epic poet since elegy and irony are far too deeply implicated in his understanding and his undermusic. But the picture of Virgil enshrined in Hermann Broch's great prose-poem about his death, the picture of a man hallucinating at the center of the world of *realpolitik*, a man ashimmer with memory even as he is turned to for prophecy, a man at work in the mineshafts of language whom others see only in the corridors of power, this picture fits the figure of the poet that Milosz has created for our times. The anti-Marxist apologist, the Aquinas of the Cold War, this Atlas of Christian humanism will claim that he is no more than a small boy playing about on a riverbank. And yet we know him to be the poet from the provinces who comprehends all history and culture because he was born and grew up in the anthropological equivalent of the golden age: survivor of wartime Europe, veteran intellectual in exile in America, the latter-day equivalent of the court poet in Rome, he has lived on to know the decadence of the post-imperial as it declines and falls towards the postmodern. This is the destined child who enters the monastery and becomes the sage, a consciousness at once Orphic and Tiresian, eastern and western, the same consciousness that speaks from behind its rhetorical brocade in the first section of Milosz's sequence called "From the Rising of the Sun." [Reads poem.]

Everything we admire in Milosz and trust and turn to again and again is in these lines: what is existentially urgent and necessary, yet pondered and caught up into the lucid order of poetry itself. Everything they call up is like an elucidation of their import. They unite, in Eliot's phrase, "the most ancient and the most civilized mentality." They could well have been spoken by Broch's Virgil or Marguerite Yourcenar's Hadrian, or James Joyce's Anna Livia, but they are in fact spoken by one who knew in his childhood (as the poem later discloses) "the scent of smoke, of late autumn dahlias / On the sloping little streets of a wooden town /. . .so long ago, in a millennium visited in dreams / Far from here, in a light of which I am uncertain."

Still, the important thing here is not who is speaking, but what the reader is hearing, which is a music that comes over us like the fulfillment of Eliot's desire that the transitory time be redeemed: "See, see, they vanish," Eliot wrote in the 1940s, "the faces and places, / With the self, which, as it could loved them, / To be renewed, transfigured, in another pattern." Milosz's poetry reaches across borders because it answers the deeply contradictory needs experienced in the modern world. It recognizes, if you will forgive the phrase, the instability of the perceiving subject and reveals con-

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sciousness as a site of contending awarenesses and discourses; and yet it does not sell the pass of individual responsibility or allow the fact that values are culturally based and ratified to negate the fundamental necessity of values themselves. In the self-interrogation that Milosz conducts between the moments of liberation offered by his poetry, the part of him that is Derrida is put into the cell with the part that is Solzhenitsyn and each suffers the force of the other's antagonism until the reintegrated poet re-emerges and utters one of my favorite descriptions of his intellectual predicament: "I was stretched," Milosz writes in *Native Realm*, "between the contemplation of a motionless point and the command to participate actively in history."

The curator of the Shakespeare birthplace at Stratford-upon-Avon once told me about seeing an early nineteenth-century visitors' book from the place that contained John Keats's signature. There it was, in the column marked *Name:* "John Keats." But in the column marked *Address* he had written only one word: "Everywhere." And in that entry, I find one way of thinking of Milosz and world poetry: no matter where we are or where we come from, his name and his work make us feel at home. And then, more recently, I found another image for this response when I read something about the siting of the image of the god Terminus in the Temple of Jupiter in ancient Rome. The statue of this god of boundaries, of borders and frontiers at their most local and most international, was placed under the open air, at a part of the temple where the roof was all skylight, as if to suggest that, while at ground level borders had to be an acknowledged fact, the hankered-for dream was unbounded space equal to desire itself. Milosz's poetry both tests and fortifies the conviction that the boy entranced by his riverbank dream will never be superceded by the adult in thrall to necessity.

Milosz occupies his place in world poetry because he fulfills the appetite for seriousness and joy which the word "poetry" awakens in every language. What entrances his readers is the plangency and certainty of his tone. The cadence too is irresistible, the cadence of a wisdom that is, against all expectation, unwearied and resilient, issuing every time as freshly as Coventina's river and yet growing as strong and as opulent as the mill-pond riding over its weir in that medieval wooden town.

Milosz restores the child's eternity at the water's edge and equally he expresses the dismay of the adult that his name is writ on water. In celebration of which vision and tough-mindedness, I conclude with this six-line poem written more than forty years ago and dedicated to his fellow Lithuanian poet, Aleksander Wat, and his wife. The title comes from the first line—"What Once Was Great":

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What once was great, now appeared small.
Kingdoms were fading like snow-covered bronze.

What once could smite, now smites no more.
Celestial earths roll on and shine.

Stretched on the grass by the bank of a river,
As long, long ago, I launch my boats of bark.

Edward Hirsch: One chilly gray dusk in 1973, in Warsaw during a year of travel in Europe, I walked through the neighborhood that had once been the Warsaw Ghetto. There was a lot of noise on the street—people were bustling home from work—but their activity only seemed to accentuate what was for me the eerie and even ghostly absence of all those missing persons, an annihilated people. One didn't need to travel to Auschwitz to feel guilty absence and palpable vacancy. As an American Jew, Polish culture seemed poignantly familiar to me, and yet I found a bewildering scarcity of actual Jews. And I, who had dreamed of European culture my entire life, was being brought face to face with Europe as a place of barbarism, the site of a double totalitarianism, one German, one Soviet. That night I reread Czeslaw Milosz's poems "A Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto," "A Song on the End of the World," "Child of Europe," and "Dedication." This last poem is addressed "To you whom I could not save," and dated Warsaw, 1945. Its key stanza has thereafter set a standard of seriousness in poetry:

What is poetry which does not save
Nations or people?
A connivance with official lies,
A song of drunkards whose throats will be cut in a moment,
Readings for sophomore girls.
That I wanted good poetry without knowing it,
That I discovered, late, its salutary aim,
In this and only this I find salvation.

Milosz's early war and post-war poems are all haunted by survivor's guilt, the poignancy of living after what was, for so many, the world's end. Poetry here becomes an offering to the dead, a form of expiation, a hope for redemption.

Milosz has lived in America for nearly four decades. But because even this part of Milosz's world feels too vast and monumental to me, I want to

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testify instead to some of what Milosz has offered me as an American poet and some of what, I think, he offers American poetry.

I have loved his work ever since that day in 1973 when I sprung $5.95 for the hardcover Seabury Press edition of his *Selected Poems*. That was a lot of money to me in those post-student days and I carried the book with me through Europe like a talisman, like a Virgilian guide. With trembling urgency I pored over "Mid-Twentieth-Century Portrait" and "Mittelbergheim" in a poorly lit café in Vienna. I remember the mounting excitement, the ecstatic drumbeat I felt pounding in my head when I read "With Trumpets and Zithers" in Sartre's café in Paris. Those were the great days of youth, of mispronouncing names and discovering European capitals. Those were the heady days of one's own first poems of adulthood, of probing one's ancestry through poetry (our origins are like an anchor in the deep, Milosz says), and I felt deeply fortunate, deeply changed to discover a poetry initiated into the apocalyptic fires of history, written at the borders of what can be said, making a profound effort at the unsayable.

There has always been in Milosz's work a fundamental element of catastrophism, a grave open-eyed lucidity about the twentieth century, and the nobility and humane grandeur of poetry (I admit I've kept that sense of it despite the poet's own disavowals). Yet one also learned from him to distrust rhetoric, to question false words and sentiments. "Try to understand this simple speech, as I would be ashamed of another," he avows in "Dedication": "I swear, there is in me no wizardry of words." Milosz's dry and deceptive simplicity distrusts what Gombrowicz calls "this pharmaceutical extract called 'pure poetry.'" One felt his anguished irony (and there has always been something unwittingly sardonic and disturbingly antic in his poetry), his humility before the perplexing plenitude of reality, the depth of his quest for clarity, for truth.

America is a fast-paced, forward-looking, technologically driven society with no real sense of history, without any true collective memory of the past. "History is bunk," Henry Ford famously said. The American poet confronts, I suppose, in his or her own person, our profound historylessness, our notorious innocence, our uncanny faith in the future, in progress, our religion of success, our materialism. I myself have often tried to write in what Emerson calls "the optative mood," and nothing comes more naturally to me as an American than the feeling that nature is essentially good.

But Milosz offers us a series of counter-truths that chasten and deepen the American poetic project. He gives us a poetry of remembrance. He uses a sense of guilt to summon old stones, those who have come before us. He bears the burden of memory. He teaches us to consider historical categories, not the idea of history vulgarized by Marxism, but something deeper and more complex, more sustaining: the feeling that mankind is memory,

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historical memory, and that "our hope is in the historical." He has given us a series of Cassandra-like warnings—both in poetry and in prose—about America's painful indifference to European experience, about the consequences of what happens when "nature becomes theatre." In Milosz's splendid poetic argument with Robinson Jeffers he counters Jeffers's praise of inhuman nature with his native realm where nature exists on a human scale. Milosz models for us his own obsessive concern with our collective destiny, what he calls "the riddle of Evil active in history." Like Aleksander Wat, whose memory he has devotedly kept alive, he is deeply aware of our tragic fragmentation, but rather than revel in it, he seeks to transcend it. In our age of profound relativism, he offers a search for eternal values, eternal truths.

Czeslaw Milosz teaches us to love lyric poetry and also to distrust it. He insists that his own poems are dictated by a daimonion, and yet he also exemplifies what it means to be a philosophic poet; he teaches us how to think in poetry. His poetry is fueled by suffering, but it is also informed by moments of radiant and unexpected happiness. He understands the cruelty of nature and yet he also remembers that the earth merits a bit, a tiny bit, of affection. He has taught us through Simone Weil that "contradiction is the lever of transcendence." He has thought about the rise and fall of civilizations, he has praised the simple marvels of the earth, the sky, and the sea. "There is so much death," he writes in "Counsels," "and that is why affection / for pigtails, bright colored sails in the wind, / for paper boats no more durable than we are." He writes of the eternal moment and the holy word: *Is*. He has reminded us how difficult it is to remain just one person, and he has deeply posited our humanness. I love his poetry most of all for its radiant moments of wonder and being, because of his tenderness toward the human.

Tomas Venclova: I am going to present a topic that is esoteric for anybody not born in Lithuania. Technically, Czeslaw Milosz was born in Lithuania, a country which shared Poland's fate for several centuries but was, and is, a very specific cultural realm. He shares this background with his predecessor, Adam Mickiewicz, who started his epic, *Pan Tadeusz,* with the famous apostrophe: "Lithuania, my fatherland." Both poets were brought up in similar social milieux of Polish-speaking gentry. Their birthplaces were small manors called Zaosie and Szetejnie (Sateiniai in Lithuanian). Of Mickiewicz's manor nothing is left; of Milosz's original manor, a school where the poet's mother Weronika taught the neighborhood children still remains.

Still, the two regions are different. When Milosz read *Pan Tadeusz* in his childhood, he was astonished by its inaccuracies, since, according to his own experience, there were no beech trees and no greyhounds in Lithuania. And if people around Zaosie used Belorussian idiom, close enough to Polish, in

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their everyday life, people around Szetejnie used Lithuanian—an archaic, convoluted, and strange language totally incomprehensible to Slavic speakers. Mickiewicz's region was part of the old Lithuanian Grand Duchy, yet not of ethnic Lithuania, and Milosz's region belonged to the Lithuanian heartland.

When one speaks about a Polish-Lithuanian linkage, England and Scotland come to mind almost automatically. Many have made the comparison. But it would be more accurate to imagine an independent—and Gaelic-speaking—republic north of England, with its capital in Edinburgh. England and Ireland would make a better analogy, since Ireland is a separate state.

These analogies are far from perfect. Unlike Gaelic, Lithuanian, arguably the most archaic living Indo-European language, is very much alive. But there is no religious contrast (Lithuanians, like Poles, are Catholics), and there was considerably less bloodshed between Poland and Lithuania than between England and Ireland. Though the animosity was sometimes severe, it was alleviated by the feeling that both countries faced common dangers (which, in our own century, had crystallized into the totalitarian threat). The only exact analogy pertains to the literary realm. It is commonplace to say that the best writers in the English language came from Ireland. Many of them, like William Butler Yeats, felt strong links to their Gaelic heritage. Similarly, Mickiewicz used to call himself "a wild Lithuanian." Cyprian Kamil Norwid, a sophisticated and idiosyncratic poet who never enjoyed Mickiewicz's fame but was perhaps his equal, did not emphasize his Lithuanian background (he considered himself to be a descendant of Vikings). However, his family name was Lithuanian (Norvydas means "he who wants to see"). Thus, Milosz is a twentieth-century heir to a well-established tradition. Like Mickiewicz, he is considered a poet of both nations by most Lithuanians, and he is well on his way to becoming as powerful a symbol of Polish-Lithuanian cultural linkage as Mickiewicz was and remains.

In the Middle Ages, as well as in the twentieth century, Lithuania distinguished herself by her fiercely independent spirit. Due to her unusual past, odd language, and folklore, which preserved obvious traces of pagan beliefs, she was always one of the most exotic and most mythologized parts of Europe, the very epitome of "otherness." To quote Milosz's *Native Realm*:

> Europe, too, had her redskins. . . .Their bows, spears, and leather-covered shields had to stand up against suits of armor and the lance, but their swiftness of maneuver made up for this shortcoming. . . .To what extent they could be called barbarians or savages it is hard to

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> determine, owing to the inadequacies of written sources and the biased judgments of the Christians. . . .And thus arose one of Europe's strangest political organisms: the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. At the zenith of its development, it reached as far as the environs of Moscow; on one side it touched the Baltic, on the other the Black Sea, it even made a vassal state out of Bessarabia. . . .

Later, the Grand Duchy entered into a dynastic union with Poland and became the very last country in Europe to renounce paganism. From then on, it was as Catholic as Poland or Ireland, which probably means more Catholic than the Pope himself. Lithuania fell under Russian sway at the end of the eighteenth century, together with the greater part of Poland. Szetejnie is situated on the very border between two Lithuanian regions, Žemaičiai (Zmudź) and Aukštaičiai (Auksztota). Traditionally, the river Nevežis (Niewiaża, renamed Issa by Milosz) is considered the borderline, which would leave Szetejnie on the Aukštaičiai side. Aukštaičiai was the core region of ancient heathen Lithuania, the breeding ground of the knights and warriors glorified by Mickiewicz, those who had established their capital, Vilnius or Wilno, in that part of the country; Žemaičiai was more pastoral and more conservative. It also adhered more stubbornly to Lithuanian language and customs. The coat of arms of Aukštaičiai was Pogoń or Vytis, an armored knight on a horse; the coat of arms of Žemaičiai was a Bear, a grumbling and not easily subdued animal. One hundred and fifty years ago, a Lithuanian poet, Simonas Stanevičius, wrote a fable, "The Horse and the Bear," depicting the meeting of two heraldic animals on the banks of Nevežis: one of them was hobbled and the other was in chains. Stanevičius obviously had in mind the occupation of the Lithuanian lands by the Russian empire, which was still around when Milosz was born but collapsed when he was six years old.

The Nevežis region was also mythologized by Henryk Sienkiewicz, the first Polish Nobel Laureate. For Milosz, Sienkiewicz's toponyms, which sounded mythical to most Polish adolescents, were the names of the adjacent villages and townships. The direct descendants of Sienkiewicz's heroes, often with the same old family names, still lived in the vicinity. Yet Milosz rejected the Sienkiewicz myth, since he knew that Lithuania was a region of heterogeneity and polyphony, of overlapping languages and styles of life, a land of difficult dialogue and not of monological Polish gentry culture.

Milosz's ancestors, at least on his mother's side, originally spoke Lithuanian and, as did virtually the entire Lithuanian gentry, became Polonized. The family had used Polish as their first and only language for several centuries. Yet from his childhood, Milosz understood at least some

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Lithuanian. Today, his Lithuanian is good enough to translate Lithuanian poetry, although he is shy to speak it and never writes in it.

Both Mickiewicz and Milosz share a centrifugal mentality which celebrates periphery. For Mickiewicz, the Lithuanian periphery was a space of wild forests and magic lakes, a land of miracles and visions opposed to pedestrian Poland proper. Milosz proposed a different symbolism. His central image is the river, with its connotations of time-flow, ritual cleansing, and rebirth; the river is surrounded, in the physical as well as in the imaginary space, by villages where everyday life is ascetic but meaningful and orderly, referring to stable values and subordinated to the rhythms of nature. Instead of the slightly bizarre gentry world depicted in *Pan Tadeusz* and *The Deluge,* Milosz's Lithuania is primarily a peasant universe, a domain of tough work and primitive spirituality, reminding one of the eighteenth-century Lithuanian poet Donelaitis—or, perhaps, of Robert Frost.

The first world war seemingly did not affect this universe too much:

> Four years of German occupation had not changed anything in Lithuania. The days unfolded, just as they had for centuries, to the rhythm of work in the fields, Catholic feasts, solemn processions, and the rites of Christian-pagan magic. . . .I entered into stunning greenness, into choruses of birds, into orchards bent low with the weight of fruit, into the enchantment of my native river, so unlike the boundless, dreary rivers of the Eastern plains.

Even the Nazi and the Soviet occupations did not destroy that world entirely. Still, they were disastrous. The Jewish population perished almost to a man, and with it a significant segment of local culture altogether disappeared. A large part of the Polish population, including the entire intelligentsia, left for Poland, not always willingly. And most Lithuanians experienced profound psychological trauma from which they have not recovered to this day.

Lithuanian national rebirth led to the establishment of the independent state, simultaneous and parallel to Poland's. Both states became antagonistic since both laid claim to Vilnius or Wilno, the ancient capital of the Grand Duchy. Milosz's parents had to leave their Lithuanian country seat since, in the opinion of the local authorities, they became representatives of a hostile nation. Young Czeslaw was sympathetic to Lithuanian national rebirth, and the Lithuanian state granted him, and many other Poles, political asylum after Poland's collapse at the beginning of World War II. In 1921, the family moved to Wilno, at that time annexed to Poland—a beautiful Baroque city with an

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Italian tinge. A provincial backwater, it nevertheless presented a sort of minor Alexandria, marked with a fine mixture of languages, customs, and historical eras. Here, Milosz attended the university, and here he became a poet.

In his student years, he was fascinated by Catastrophist thinking which attempted to interpret anew the disasters of war and revolution, as well as the very concepts of evil and eschatology. For Catastrophists, the crisis of the twentieth century assumed not merely historical but cosmic proportions. This philosophy also had its adherents in independent Lithuania. Oscar Milosz, Czeslaw's elder relative, was the most serious among them. He became a Lithuanian diplomat in France, supported Lithuania's claims to her capital, and was, for that reason, ostracized by Polish public opinion. Under Oscar Milosz's guidance, Czeslaw became even more interested in Lithuania's separate tradition. Characteristically, the literary magazine he established with his student friends appeared under the title *Zagary* (brushwood) which means nothing in Polish but is immediately understood by any Lithuanian.

Three more Lithuanians influenced Milosz: Pranas Ančevicius, an émigré of leftist yet very sober views who became his tutor in politics; Kazys Boruta, a born anarchist and fascinating writer; and Juozas Keliuotis, the editor of a highbrow journal in Kaunas, Lithuania's temporary capital. Each of them suffered a tragic fate. After the Soviet invasion, both Boruta and Keliuotis were imprisoned. Boruta retained his integrity but came out of the gulag a very ill man. Keliuotis became not only sick but morally broken; Ančevicius managed to emigrate but committed suicide in Canada.

The Soviet invasion in the summer of 1940 was fateful for Milosz as well. He left Lithuania without the slightest hope of seeing her again. I was one of the few who predicted that Milosz would be awarded an honorary degree by a university in the free Lithuania, which happened fifty-two years later. In the year of his visit, 1992, Milosz published a book in which he wrote:

> Wilno with the details of its streets, brick walls, shops, courtyards, church facades remains for me the city which I might have left yesterday. . . .It is once more a capital of the independent Lithuania, and I am happy because of the fact, since I wish that city well.

In Milosz's perception, time is a substance with which one should never tamper. And one should not violate ancient taboos. All metamorphoses have to occur naturally and not as a result of applying some utopian doctrine concocted by politicians or armchair scientists. This may be called a conservative view but it is, first and foremost, profoundly anti-totalitarian. Milosz distrusts the relativistic attitude of our

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era, and not without reason: there are certain immutable values, after all.

Milosz understands the profound emotional significance assigned to language in Eastern Europe. While it may be fraught with linguistic nationalism and destructive tribal attitudes, it also has unique existential value affirming one's identity and historical roots. In Eastern European countries, and especially in Lithuania, a deeply poetic attitude towards language is shared by many: it is indispensable for spiritual and even physical survival. Here, Milosz is close to the Old Testament understanding of the links between culture and transcendence. Moreover, he attempts to create an intellectual bridge between the religious and scientific *Weltanschauungen.*

My first acquaintance with Milosz's writing was *Native Realm.* It was sent into Vilnius page by page in letters from the West. The process of sending the book took a year and a half. Then, it was sewn together (incidentally, two pages were missing), furnished with an innocent-looking cover, and given to me by a friend. I read it sitting on a bench, on the bank of the river Neris, and suddenly I noticed that the very same bench was described by Milosz in a chapter dealing with the Soviet invasion of 1940. I saw the same sandbars, the electric-power plant, and fishermen, almost identical to those Milosz saw more than two decades before. To Milosz, the river current and the sky at that time spoke "of an irrevocable sentence." For me, they were permeated by a light of hope, and the hope was due to the fact that the book finally found its way to its own city. After several more decades, the hope has been fulfilled. One may ascribe it to God, or to the laws of history, or, perhaps, in the most justified way, to the will of the peoples who had resolved to be free. I would ascribe it also to the books written by Czeslaw Milosz.

Robert Faggen: Tomas now would like to have someone read a poem of Milosz's; perhaps Mr. Hirsch would read "In Szetejnie."

Edward Hirsch: It strikes me that the world is a miraculous place and that when my grandfather came from Latvia he didn't suspect that some day I'd be reading this great poem of Lithuania in English! [Reads poem.]

Adam Zagajewski: The *oeuvre* of Czeslaw Milosz is vast and mysterious. I deeply admire his work, and I have learned a lot from it, as a reader and a poet. We recognize major poets by their voice, their subject matter, their particular tone, or by their favorite particular form. Czeslaw Milosz is somehow different. He has his tone, but many voices, many forms. The unifying factor seems to be a unique perspective, a unique grasp of the world, a changing understanding of the visible and the invisible, a vision

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that is so powerful that it generates poetry. So much so that the main impression I gain from rereading Czeslaw Milosz's selected or collected poems is the encounter with an exceptional force, a force that informs all of his poems and, in a different way, all of his essays. What is this force? I think it's not possible to name it, to define it. One can only try to get a little nearer to it.

By chance, I've found two sentences by the French poet Paul Claudel, in his book *Memoirs Improvisés*, which can serve as a kind of motto for this talk and for the process of looking for the main thing in Milosz's work. Claudel said, "What really matters is not to be defeated; what really matters is not to become like this unhappy Verlaine, or Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, whom I met at Mallarmé's, not to become a defeated one. I want to be a winner." And it came into my mind that in a somewhat different way, Milosz wanted to be a winner. To be a winner definitely meant something different for Claudel than for Milosz, though even Claudel had to take into consideration energies that were still at work when Milosz's generation went into action. Anyway, I don't intend to establish a parallel between Claudel and Milosz; it wouldn't make much sense.

So, what had it meant for Czeslaw Milosz to win? It had nothing or very little to do with his career, or career-oriented thinking, but had everything to do with having started the literary activity in a treacherous moment, in a treacherous century, in line with the confines of an ambivalent literary movement called "modernism," and in a country whose political identity was just formed or reformed, and whose future, as seen in the thirties, was dark. To win meant just to survive, physically and spiritually. To survive as a poet, you had to deploy a leftist line, a Marxist one, or a right-wing one, a nationalist one. The trap of narrow politicking, the trap of shallow aestheticism, the trap of passivity, of narcissism, of whining. Even the poems from the thirties that were written under the sign of the so-called "catastrophism" were defiant, almost arrogant, in their pessimism. And they already had this metaphysical edge that would remain a constant mark of Milosz's poetry. This force showed itself both in the defiance and in the fact that the poems from the thirties transcended the given, limited situation. And then, a bit later, poetry written under the Nazi occupation operated in a somehow similar way, transcending the cage of the situation, though these poems were no more arrogant. With it came, again a little bit later, the Hegelian temptation, the Manichean temptation, and again later in poems like "Mittelbergheim" the search for solace from the universe, the same universe whose opaque solidity was so threatening for the catastrophist. The late fifties, the sixties, and the seventies bring about the majestic parade of the poems that enchant the reader by their masterly blend of the philosophical duality with the duality of their aesthetic presentation. The philosophical and the religious duality

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consist in the combination of the Christian pessimism and eschatalogical hope, a rejection of modernity and acceptance of modernity. On the poetic, artistic level the same duality manifests itself by a constant shift, a constant oscillation between the high diction, the almost Biblical diction of bliss, and the low diction of disappointment, between the sublime and the mean, the despicable. And also in the constant move between the essence of things and frivolous or almost frivolous appearances, between diminutives like "little rabbit" and high diction, between *esse*, in the prose poem "*Esse*," and the human face. In the sixties, seventies, and eighties, his poetry has become populated by individuals and objects. There is more and more tenderness in it, sometimes shockingly mixed with the sardonic angry aloofness of the demanding prophet, as in the poem "Oeconomia Divina." This prophet sometimes hesitates, denies his hope, speaks with different voices, impersonates evil and good spirits. But there's more and more tenderness, more and more memory: "Elegy for N. N." opens a long series of splendid poems that capture a single human fate, a gesture, a moment, a day. A woman who lived a hundred years ago rises from the ashes and enjoys a brief cameo appearance on the screen of Milosz's verses. But even this tenderness, so humane, has an eschatological undertone; it seems to be a preparation for a gigantic catalogue of women and men, women first. For things to come, for last things, which perhaps won't be the last. The same tenderness explodes in *Unattainable Earth*, and gets entangled in the doings of the era.

The main thing for Milosz is of course poetry, but it has been accompanied by other endeavors. One of them is essay writing, which for Milosz has never been a leisurely activity, a kind of Sunday writing. In the essays, his marvellous alert intelligence has kept vigil and has protected the main body of Milosz's writing, his poetry, from the poisons of the time, from mistakes, from despair. Another part of Milosz's life work has been his dialogue with other poets, living and dead, Polish, European, and American. He has been a voracious reader, translator, and critic of other poets' work, has assimilated and sometimes rejected their aesthetics. Before the war French poetry attracted his attention—Oscar Milosz, but also others, some with a more cosmic perspective, perhaps including even Paul Claudel. With the changing challenges, Milosz turned to English language poets. T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden were helpful in dealing with the problems of history and politics. Much later, he was drawn to American poets who resisted confessional poetry and kept seeing the objective world. He read and commented on Polish poets, with Adam Mickiewicz as his absolute master, and the whole, as he calls it, "household" of Polish poetry.

If I had more time, I would discuss the fascinating combination in his work of his liberal, political sympathies and his deep interest in the mystery of the transcendent. This combination creates the most unusual and

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most welcome model, perhaps a model for the future. What a force was needed to outwit this treacherous century. The force of wisdom and faith. He is a winner. Thank you.

Robert Faggen: At this point, I wonder if the panelists have any questions or comments for each other. One issue that kept coming up was the question of the idea of art, of high art. Seamus, we're haunted by the idea in Broch's *The Death of Virgil* that Virgil is burning his poem. And one of the things that runs throughout Czeslaw Milosz's poetry is the severe questioning of the idea of art, or an idea of art, and that, to all of you as artists, must be something that is quite striking. A short poem comes to mind, one that I'm sure all of you are familiar with, called "Incantation." And it's placed next to perhaps a better-known poem called "*Ars Poetica?*". "Incantation."

> Human reason is beautiful and invincible.
> No bars, no barbed wire, no pulping of books,
> No sentence of banishment can prevail against it.
> It establishes the universal ideas in language,
> And guides our hand so we write Truth and Justice
> With capital letters, lie and oppression with small. [. . .]

And yet a page later, he writes, in "*Ars Poetica?*":

> In the very essence of poetry there is something indecent:
> a thing is brought forth which we didn't know we had in us,
> so we blink our eyes, as if a tiger had sprung out
> and stood in the light, lashing his tail.

How do you take the tone, the wisdom, of that first poem "Incantation," in light of the questioning of poetry in "*Ars Poetica?*" Or do we take "Incantation" itself as a kind of ironic questioning of the power of art?

Seamus Heaney: It's as if uttered from the pulpit. It reaches for the authority of pulpit truth. And something in us wants to rejoice in this utterance. But I think it is framed; by the end—"their enemies have delivered themselves to destruction"—the preacher has taken over. Too confidently. But the poem is not ironical in any demeaning way. I take it to be an ardent hope undermined by all that we know surrounds it.

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Edward Hirsch: But both things are true: human reason is human and invincible and yet poems are not only written out of human reason but come from some other force. These are poems written as a kind of dialogue between history and transcendence. They're not philosophical essays. It seems to me that they're in tremendous quest of beautiful reason. They are also powered by the deep recognition that poetry doesn't entirely come from reason. It seems to me that both poems acknowledge the truth of the actual nature of what it is to make poems.

Tomas Venclova: Poets in general are instruments of language, probably the main area which gives us the idea of transcendence, of something immutable, of some eternal link, let us say, between Homer and ourselves. At the same time, language gives us the possibility of questioning everything, including language itself. Poetry brings that to the *n*th power.

Adam Zagajewski: I think that here we are touching on one of the main contradictions of Milosz's poetry, his ambivalent relationship to modernism—which he both admires and hates. He admires it for its aesthetic beauty, but I suspect he sees some kind of a narrowness in it, and this conflict, among other things, is a conflict between wisdom and aesthetics. I think the cunningness of modernism makes Milosz both happy and unhappy.

Seamus Heaney: There's another poem that I love for the ruthlessness of the energy of its truth-seeking and its desire to hack away everything that is beautiful but also fake—"Child of Europe." [Reads from poem.] It's thrilling because it is a kind of flame-throwing.

Robert Faggen: Robert Frost once said that poetry is a very rural thing. Of course, it has great pastoral roots. Many of you have touched upon this sense of rootedness, that sense of origins in the pastoral. And yet there is a sense too of the powerful influence of the cosmopolitan city, as in the case of Wilno. In "Bypassing Rue Descartes," there seems to be a rejection of the ultimate longing for a cosmopolitan utopia. How has this negotiation between the rural and the urban, the pastoral and the problem with recovering the pastoral, appeared in his poetry?

Tomas Venclova: I feel very lonely among Lithuanian poets because all of them have those rural roots and I don't. For me, the city is nature and architecture is grass or trees. So I don't have this feeling of rootedness, which Milosz has to a very large degree. Not everybody has this binocular relation, which in his case gives us a profound stereoscopy of sight.

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Seamus Heaney: Edwin Muir, the visionary Orkney poet, wrote an autobiography rather like *Native Realm*. He was born in the 1880s on Orkney—really on Ithaca about the time of Telemachus. And he ended up in Glasgow, in post-nineteenth-century industrial Britain. He said something like, "Although my chronological age at that time was twenty-two, culturally I was about five hundred years of age." I think rural and urban are being specified here a little too neatly; it's anthropological stages rather than topographical or sociological divisions that we're dealing with. It's not quite—or not just—autobiographical poetry; it's almost always of the species. And that's what relates to the language too, the feeling of things being transcended.

Adam Zagajewski: Doesn't Southern California sort of abolish this contradiction? Isn't Berkeley both countryside and city? In California, Milosz found a place where there is a kind of balance between the two.

Robert Faggen: Perhaps, Adam, you could explore the tension between what one could call Milosz's conservative attachment to an immutable and eternal reality and his restless and relentless exploration of new poetic forms.

Adam Zagajewski: Yes, Milosz makes the easy classifications and typologies anachronistic. He is in some respect conservative; he has a conservative imagination, in which transcendence is the main vault of the imaginary and real world. But, as you say, he is a modernist of his generation; he experiments with genres both in writing poetry and in writing essays. And his political views are not conservative. By abolishing those easy oppositions, he creates an interesting model of the modern man who cherishes memory, who cherishes truth and transcendence, but who rejects easy political conclusions such as those of the Moral Majority while accepting the wonderful complexity of the modern world and modern literature. By doing so, he is able to abolish too easy and too permanent oppositions.

Edward Hirsch: Milosz offers us a series of common truths. But in the second half of the twentieth century the Emersonian vision has to be modified by some sort of historical thinking. Milosz offers us such an alternative—the opportunity to come up with another model of American literary history, one that is not written almost entirely out of its relationship and conflict with English poetry. If you were to take a poll of who actually writes American poetry, you'd find very few American poets who have their roots in England. Our language may be rooted in England, but our ancestry comes from all over the world. When I read Milosz and other Polish poets, and Hungarian poets, when I read Miklos Radnoti, or Czech poets like Jiri Orten, I recognized a tonality that seemed familiar to me and that I did not

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hear in English and American poetry. And why wouldn't I, since my family actually came from Eastern Europe, not from England? Our poetry comes out of Mexico, China, Japan, Thailand, and out of all the different countries of Europe. Our poetry comes from everywhere Americans come from. Milosz offers us an American poetry that's related to Europe, and to Eastern Europe, in another way than American poets have often thought about.

Robert Faggen: Seamus, I wonder whether you could perhaps comment on whether or not there's any connection between the condition out of which Milosz wrote—being in a Catholic-dominated country that has suffered severe oppression—and your own experience, from another such country.

Seamus Heaney: My country has suffered oppression. In my lifetime, however, it has been relatively free of it. But I want to go back to the previous question, to the appeal of this poetry. I said once in an interview that what attracted me in Milosz was a sense of a pre-Reformation world, a stirring of the Catholic unconscious. What happened to the English language after Shakespeare was that it was kind of swept clean of a lot of pre-Reformation association and melody; it was Roundheaded a little bit by Milton, and clipped down, and then lawn-mowed by Tennyson—Lawn Tennyson, as Joyce calls Sir Alfred. So what is in the poetry of Milosz for an Irish person from my kind of background is largely cultural ratification, a Dantesque corroboration that says, yeah, the universe is much bigger than the Thirty-Nine Articles. The language leads you into the eternal: the eternal margarita, which is mentioned in the poem on Dante, is given a new radiance, is readmitted into the language. This is one of the virtues of the translations by Robert Hass and others, this sense of opulence, which English poetry is particularly shy of. Anything Cavalier, long-haired, Caroline, is clipped immediately by the linguistic censor in England. But it is encouraged by Milosz in translation.

Robert Faggen: I suppose that the image of the snake at the end of "Bypassing Rue Descartes" has a particular meaning for someone from Lithuania. Tomas, perhaps you could explain that.

Tomas Venclova: Well, in ancient Lithuania, snakes were considered holy animals, and one was not supposed to touch a water snake: killing a water snake was a sin. Those beliefs survived in Lithuania well into the nineteenth and even into the twentieth century. This is one of the instances of this archaic *Weltanschauung.* I would also say that Milosz corrects it in American attitudes, along with, for instance, the late Joseph Brodsky. In Eastern Europe, we have a much clearer feeling of the difference between good and evil. Due to our experiences, those things must be distinguished.

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Robert Faggen: Please join me in thanking Seamus Heaney, Edward Hirsch, Tomas Venclova, and Adam Zagajewski. Right now Jerzy Illg has set up the printing press to print souvenirs of this festival—that's out in the courtyard. This evening Robert Hass and Seamus Heaney will read from their work.

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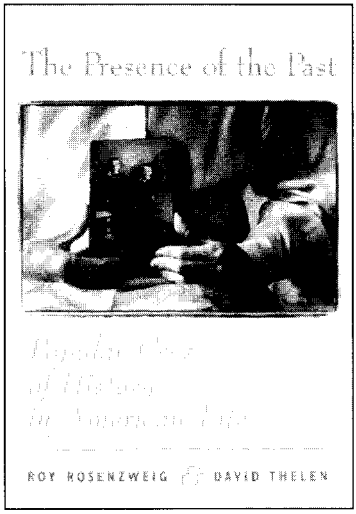

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ROBERT HASS AND SEAMUS HEANEY

Robert Hass: This afternoon four of my favorite poets talked about Milosz. Four Miloszs emerged. I don't have any theories about his poetry, so I'm going to read through some of Milosz's poems, not the most famous ones, to give you some sense of his work. Then you figure out if you could stand up and sit on a panel and in fifteen minutes say, "Here's what this poet is about." For the young poets, here's a poem that he probably wrote when he was nineteen or twenty years old, published in his first book, in 1933, called *A Poem on Frozen Time*. It's called "Artificer."

> Burning, he walks in the stream of flickering letters, clarinets,
> machines throbbing quicker than the heart, lopped-off heads, silk
> canvases, and he stops under the sky
>
> and raises toward it his joined clenched fists.
>
> Believers fall on their bellies, they suppose it is a monstrance that
> shines,
>
> but those are knuckles, sharp knuckles shine that way, my friends. [. . .]

It sounds like the poem of an anarchist. Three years later, he wrote "The Song," which is an early version of a kind of debate between the soul and the Earth that goes on throughout Milosz's poems. Here, the speakers are identified as "Woman" and "Chorus," and then a final speaker is called "The last voices." He was twenty-three years old.

> *Woman:*
> Earth flows away from the shore where I stand,
> her trees and grasses, more and more distant, shine.
> Buds of chestnuts, lights of frail birches,
> I won't see you anymore.
> With worn-out people you move away,
> with the sun waving like a flag you run toward the night,
> I am afraid to stay here alone, I have nothing except my body
> —it glistens in the dark, a star with crossed hands,
> so that I am scared to look at myself. Earth,
> do not abandon me.
>
> *Chorus:*
> Ice flowed down the rivers, trees spouted buoyant leaves,
> ploughs went through the fields, doves in the forest are cooing,

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a doe runs in the hills and cries her exulting songs,
tall-stemmed flowers are blooming, steam rises from warm gardens,
Children throw balls, they dance on the meadow by threesomes,
women wash linen at streamside and fish for the moon.
All joy comes from the earth, there is no delight without her,
man is given to the earth, let him desire no other. [. . .]

Not bad for a 23-year-old. 1934. In 1944, well into the occupation of Warsaw, he wrote an uncharacteristic poem. We'll be talking in some detail about the most famous poem of these years, "The World." But he also wrote a series of poems called "Songs of Adrian Zielińsky," which are about a poet with normal aesthetic ambitions writing poetry in wartime. They could have just been ironic, but it's not in his character to just be ironic. Here's the first one. [Reads poem.] Within a year, at the end of the war, he wrote another most extraordinary poem, when a gesture was needed to lay to rest the 250,000 people killed by the German army in the Warsaw uprising. It's called "Dedication."

You whom I could not save
Listen to me.
Try to understand this simple speech as I would be ashamed of another.
I swear, there is in me no wizardry of words.
I speak to you with silence like a cloud or a tree.

What strengthened me, for you was lethal.
You mixed up farewell to an epoch with the beginning of a new one,
Inspiration of hatred with lyrical beauty,
Blind force with accomplished shape.

Here is the valley of shallow Polish rivers. And an immense bridge
Going into white fog. Here is a broken city,
And the wind throws the screams of gulls on your grave
When I am talking with you.

What is poetry which does not save
Nations or people?
A connivance with official lies,
A song of drunkards whose throats will be cut in a moment,
Readings for sophomore girls.
That I wanted good poetry without knowing it,
That I discovered, late, its salutary aim,
In this and only this I find salvation.

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They used to pour millet on graves or poppy seeds
To feed the dead who would come disguised as birds.
I put this book here for you, who once lived
So that you should visit us no more.

By 1960, Milosz found himself in Berkeley, California, facing out to the Pacific. He wrote of the experience in 1962, beginning with a line from a famous seventeenth-century Polish pastoral poem: "Gently my lambs, move gently. . . "["Far West"].

"Gently, my lambs, move gently"
Through bays, many, of darkening time.
Sea lions with scepters on rocky thrones.
Far, far from everything, throw behind you a comb, a forest will grow,
Throw behind you a mirror, an ocean will ripen. [. . .]

As soon as Milosz begins to think about memory, he thinks about his whole career, and about language. What he says about language is, for a poet, disturbing. Milosz makes "the instability of the perceiving subject" seem like child's play. Maybe language should anchor it, the desired word. This meditation is from his great masterwork "From the Rising of the Sun":

The Alpine shooting star, *Dodecathon alpinum*,
Grows in the mountain woods over Rogue River,
Which river, in southern Oregon,
Owing to its rocky, hardly accessible banks,
Is a river of fishermen and hunters. The black bear and the cougar
Are still relatively common on these slopes.
The plant was so named for its pink-purple flowers
Whose slanting tips point to the ground from under the petals,
And resembles a star from nineteenth-century illustrations
That falls, pulling along a thin sheaf of lines.
The name was given to the river by French trappers
When one of them stumbled into an Indian ambush.
From that time on they called it La Rivière des Coquins,
The River of Scoundrels, or Rogue, in translation. [. . .]

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In "A Mirrored Gallery," he began to add prose commentaries to his poems [Reads excerpt]. In the middle of this wild cascade, in the wildness of Milosz, I guess, comes a woman's voice:

> You talked, but after your talking all the rest remains.
> After your talking—poets, philosophers, contrivers
> of romances—
> Everything else, all the rest deduced inside the flesh
> Which lives and knows, not just what is permitted.
> I am a woman held fast now in a great silence.
> Not all creatures have your need for words.
>
> Birds you killed, fish you tossed into your boat,
> In what words will they find rest and in what Heaven?
>
> You received gifts from me; they were accepted.
> But you don't understand how to think about the dead.
> The scent of winter apples, of hoarfrost, and of linen:
> There are nothing but gifts on this poor, poor Earth.

Having written a perfect lyric poem most poets would walk away. But Milosz goes on to meditate on the education of women in the nineteenth century in "A Dark Academy" [Reads poem.]

In 1983, somewhere near the end of this extraordinary cascade of wrestling with memory and history, the nature of consciousness, and the possibilities of language, he writes in prose:

> To find my home in one sentence, concise, as if hammered in metal. Not to enchant anybody. Not to earn a lasting name in prosperity. An unnamed need for order, for rhythm, for form, which three words are opposed to chaos and nothingness.

Thank you very much.

Seamus Heaney: I too shall begin with H and M. This is a poem called "Rivers," translated by Bob I think. "Rivers." Not by me, by Czeslaw Milosz.

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Under various names, I have praised only you, rivers!

You are milk and honey and love and death and dance.

From a spring in hidden grottoes, seeping from mossy rocks

Where a goddess pours live water from a pitcher,

At clear streams in the meadow, where rills murmur underground,

Your race and my race begin, and amazement, and quick passage.

Naked, I exposed my face to the sun, steering with hardly a dip of the paddle—

Oak woods, fields, a pine forest skimming by,

Around every bend the promise of the earth,

Village smoke, sleepy herds, flights of martins over sandy bluffs.

I entered your waters slowly, step by step,

And the current in that silence took me by the knees

Until it surrendered and it carried me and I swam

Through the huge reflected sky of a triumphant noon.

I was on your banks at the onset of midsummer night

When the full moon rolls out and lips touch in the rituals of kissing—

I hear in myself, now as then, the lapping of water by the boathouse

And the whisper that calls me in for an embrace and for consolation.

We go down with the bells ringing in all the sunken cities.

Forgotten, we are greeted by the embassies of the dead,

While your endless flowing carries us on and on;

And neither is nor was. The moment only, eternal.

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Yeats said, "Only that which is weak will win," or something like that. Meaning, basically, that a rhythm will change the world. This next poem is written in that faith, although it looks back to events which should have rendered such a faith ridiculous. It is called "1945" and was written in 1985.

—You! the last Polish poet!—drunk, he embraced me,
My friend from the Avante-Garde, in a long military coat,
Who had lived through the war in Russia and, there, understood.

He could not have learned those things from Apollinaire,
Or Cubist manifestos, or the festivals of Paris streets.
The best cure for illusions is hunger, patience, and obedience.

In their fine capitals they still liked to talk
Yet the twentieth century went on. It was not they
Who would decide what words were going to mean. [. . .]

A friend of mine once asked Robert Lowell, "What do you think of Heaney's poems?" I had just translated a Middle Irish story in prose and verse called "Buile Suibhne: The Madness of Sweeney," about an early medieval king who is cursed by a saint and turned into a creature who lives on the mountains, in the woods. Until Beckett arrives in Irish literature, he, Sweeney, is the most resourceful complainer. And whinges constantly about having to live in these denuded conditions. He praises the trees a lot, and so on. Anyway, Lowell answered my friend: "Ah, lots of trees." Well, Czeslaw too has lots of forests and rivers and so, to throw a kind of branchy net between Ireland and Lithuania, I will say this translation of one of the pieces of "Buile Suibne," where Sweeney praises the trees and vegetation of the countryside. He praises it in a very traditional way, so the translation is an almost nursery rhyme verse. "Mad Sweeney's Praise of the Trees."

The bushy leafy oak tree
is highest in the wood,
the forking shoots of hazel
hide sweet hazel-nuts.

The alder is my darling,
all thornless in the gap,
some milk of human kindness
coursing in its sap.

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The blackthorn is a jaggy creel
stippled with dark sloes;
green watercress in thatch on wells
where the drinking blackbird goes.

Sweetest of the leafy stalks,
the vetches strew the pathway;
the oyster-grass is my delight,
and the wild strawberry.

Low-set clumps of apple trees
drum down fruit when shaken;
scarlet berries clot like blood
on mountain rowan.

Briars curl in sideways,
arch a stickle back,
draw blood and curl up innocent
to sneak the next attack.

The yew tree in each churchyard
wraps night in its dark hood.
Ivy is a shadowy
genius of the wood.

Holly rears its windbreak,
a door in winter's face;
life-blood on a spear-shaft
darkens the grain of ash.

Birch tree, smooth and blessed,
delicious to the breeze,
high twigs plait and crown it
the queen of trees.

The aspen pales
and whispers, hesitates:
a thousand frightened scuts
race in its leaves.

But what disturbs me most
in the leafy wood
is the to and fro and to and fro
of an oak rod.

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I wrote a little sequence of poems then called "Sweeney Redivivus," a kind of "Sweeney Rides Again," which was also a way of rhyming Heaney's experience with Sweeney's. I'll read one of the sequence called "In the Beech." It combines Sweeney the mad king in the tree and myself in a beech tree in 1942 when American troops arrived in County Derry to train for D-Day. I felt like a little Tarzan watching the arrival of tanks in the farmland. Anyway this is half Sweeney, half Heaney. "In the Beech."

I was a lookout posted and forgotten.

On one side under me, the concrete road.
On the other, the bullocks' covert,
the breath and plaster of a drinking place
where the school-leaver discovered peace
to touch himself in the reek of turned-up mud.
And the tree itself a strangeness and a comfort,
as much a column as a bole. The very ivy
puzzled its milk-tooth frills and tapers
over the grain: was it bark or masonry?

I watched the red-brick chimney rear
its stamen course by course,
and the steeplejacks up there at their antics
like flies against the mountain.

I felt the tanks' advance beginning
at the cynosure of the growth rings,
then winced at their imperium refreshed
in each powdered bolt mark on the concrete.
And the pilot with his goggles back came in
so low I could see the cockpit rivets.

My hidebound boundary tree. My tree of knowledge.
My thick-tapped, soft-fledged, airy listening post.

This "Sweeney Redivivus," Sweeney riding again, has adventures and rare encounters and so on and in one of the poems remembers meeting a master. Now Heaney too had met a master with Bob Hass one night in Berkeley, so it was Milosz I was thinking of when I wrote "The Master." He's hidden in there.

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He dwelt in himself
like a rook in an unroofed tower.

To get close I had to maintain
a climb up deserted ramparts
and not flinch, not raise an eye
to search for an eye on the watch
from his coign of seclusion.

Deliberately he would unclasp
his book of withholding
a page at a time and it was nothing
arcane, just the old rules
we all had inscribed on our slates.
Each character blocked on the parchment secure
in its volume and measure.
Each maxim given its space.

Tell the truth. Do not be afraid.
Durable, obstinate notions,
like quarrymen's hammers and wedges proofed
by intransigent service.
Like coping stones where you rest
in the balm of the wellspring.

How flimsy I felt climbing down
the unrailed stairs on the wall,
hearing the purpose and venture
in a wing-flap above me.

Quite often, early Irish poems are written by monks in the Irish language, in the margins of the manuscripts of Latin gospels. So you have the two cultures, the native Druidic inheritance, and then the Mediterranean, the Christian, both of which are present in this next poem, called "Alphabets." It was influenced by the translation of "The World," Milosz's poem of the 1940s, and was written at Harvard in 1984 for the Phi Beta Kappa exercises. Traditionally the poem for the Phi Beta Kappa exercises is a poem about learning. This is about learning in the primal sense, about learning to write, to form the letters on a slate or a page. Then at the secondary school in Derry, which is the school of Doire, the oak wood, and the school of Saint Columb who was the scribe, I learned the Irish language, the Irish script, and I also learned Latin. The letter O has a sort of structural function; the poem begins with it, the first section ends with the O of the globe, and the last section ends with an astronaut seeing the planet

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earth like O as in Ovum. "Alphabets." [Reads poem.] Now, a sonnet, one that Czeslaw included in his *Book of Luminous Things:*

When all the others were away at Mass
I was all hers as we peeled potatoes.
They broke the silence, let fall one by one
Like solder weeping off the soldering iron:
Cold comforts set between us, things to share
Gleaming in a bucket of clean water.
And again let fall. Little pleasant splashes
From each other's work would bring us to our senses.

So while the parish priest at her bedside
Went hammer and tongs at the prayers for the dying
And some were responding and some crying
I remembered her head bent towards my head,
Her breath in mine, our fluent dipping knives—
Never closer the rest of our whole lives.

In conclusion, I will read a poem set on the banks of one of my own rivers and it's also about two names for one thing. The perch, I'm afraid, in our country was called "the grunt," but even so the poem is called "The Perch" and I would like to dedicate it to Czeslaw for all of his great river reveries.

Perch on their water perch hung in the clear Bann River
Near the clay bank in alder dapple and waver,

Perch we called "grunts," little flood-slubs, runty and ready,
I saw and I see in the river's glorified body

That is passable through, but they're bluntly holding the pass,
Under the water-roof, over the bottom, adoze,

Agape on the current, against it, all muscle and slur
In the finland of perch, the fenland of alder, on air

That is water, on carpets of Bann stream, on hold
In the everything flows and steady go of the world.

Robert Faggen: Thank you both. Good night Czeslaw, and all of you.

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THE CAPTIVE MIND

Robert Faggen: This morning, we will hear four comments on *The Captive Mind*. **Andrzej Walicki** is O'Neill Professor of History at the University of Notre Dame; his last book *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom* contains a section on *The Captive Mind*. **Irena Grudzińska-Gross** is currently editing a forthcoming book, *Letters from Freedom*, by **Adam Michnik**. Adam Michnik is a hero of modern democracy, one of the leaders of Solidarity. He has fulfilled the prophecy of *The Captive Mind*, to liberate ourselves from the demons of Hegelianism. **Edith Kurzweil** is a University Professor at Adelphi University and the editor of *Partisan Review*.

Andrzej Walicki: I will begin by asking: in what sense, if any, has *The Captive Mind* ceased to be relevant? It shared the fate of all books on classical totalitarianism, since they all had wrongly assumed that the totalitarian system essentially was immune from change. Hence they all lacked adequate tools for interpreting post-Stalinist changes.

The Captive Mind describes communist totalitarianism as ideocratic, spiritual tyranny and not merely a system of external coercion. George Orwell defined this distinctive feature as coercion of people from within through control of their thoughts and feelings—not merely as negative control, but also positive control, which dictates what people should think and thereby deprives them of the freedom to be themselves. To this end, the Stalinist state used every means from naked terror to organized ideological pressure. External coercion and physical fear were reinforced, sometimes even replaced, by a sort of moral or quasi-moral terror, by organized moral blackmail, capable of paralyzing people's will through a sort of ideocratic fear. But ideocratic unanimity was not an end in itself, in contrast to the traditional, custom-based unanimity; it was to be a unanimity of the revolutionary collective will that subordinates everything to the unachieved ultimate goal. Hence the importance of the chiliastic ingredient of communism as a dynamic new faith, a secular religion of earth's collective salvation, of history. This faith, Kolakowski said, endowed the individual with the most intense feeling of the meaning of life. It was experienced as such by the victims of the Moscow trials, for whom this meaning was more important than life itself, and who consoled themselves with the belief that Stalin personified the stream of history. Dismissing such testimonies as mere expressions of interiorized physical fear fails to take into account that many western communists and fellow travelers who did not live under terror were equally infatuated with the new faith.

In *The God That Failed*, published just a few years before *The Captive Mind*, Arthur Koestler described this conversion as a mental explosion and a true initiation into a redeeming knowledge. Orwell ignored this aspect and concentrated on the nightmare of universal thought control without attempting to explain the temptation of the new faith. Milosz corrected this

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reductionism by describing "the power of attraction exercised by totalitarian thinking." Above all, he analyzed the multiple ways of resisting ideocratic pressures through different combinations of maintaining outward conformity along with a sense of separate identity. This was neither an Orwellian description of total enslavement from within, nor an analysis of total commitment. But Orwell's *1984*, *The God That Failed*, and Milosz's *The Captive Mind* were all written at the time when communist totalitarianism seemed to have stabilized and had fully developed the ideocratic features that imposed a sort of collective hypnosis on the population, and, at the same time, had a mesmerizing effect on the progressive intellectuals in the West, especially in France. Therefore, the classical fear of totalitarianism then tended to perceive it as final and basically unchangeable.

The soul of 1955-56 undermined this fatalism. The disappearance of ideocracy was most rapid and obvious in Poland. In the Soviet Union, the changes were much slower, but visible enough to cause Hannah Arendt to proclaim in the sixties the beginning of an authentic, though never unequivocal, process of detotalitarianization. This was not a morally uplifting process. On the contrary, Ernest Gellner aptly noticed that mass murder under Stalin did not undermine conviction, but that the squalor of Brezhnev's era did. The living faith had disappeared. "The really existing" socialism cannot be seen as a messianic creed, nor are corrupt *apparatchiks* new Christians.

Milosz developed the concept of Ketman to describe citizens engaged in the so-called people's democracies in a conscious mass play to deceive their rulers. It is not a mechanism of enslavement but of resistance. The term "Ketman" had been coined in Islamic civilization, as a sophisticated technique of mimicry and deception bound up with a form of positive self-assertion through interpreting the obligatory faith in one's own special way and thus saving one's separate identity. People playing Ketman were afraid of the *mullahs*, but were superior to them and enjoyed deceiving them. Thus Ketman must be clearly distinguished from other forms of adaptation to ideocratic pressures, from the blind commitment of people fully identified with the new faith. Milosz describes them as having swallowed the pill of *Murti-Bing*. The essence of Ketman was "a game played in defense of one's thought and feelings." The dependence of the Ketman players on the new faith was only partial, not total. The attitude toward the imposed ideological self involved an active, although disguised, resistance. Hence it is misleading to read Ketman as a self-justifying mechanism of capitulation leading inevitably to full mental captivity. True, Milosz did not predict any weakening of ideological pressures, and he declared in this book his lack of belief in the possibility of outwitting the totalitarian devil. This judgment stemmed from his pessimistic and, at that time, fully justified diagnosis. He demonstrated that under totalitarianism all forms of resistance were

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doomed; the logic of the Cold War resulted in a situation in which the only choice was between absolute conformity to one system or the other. Milosz's classification of the different forms of Ketman made for more confusion. Surprisingly, he did not include the form of Ketman that was particularly important in his case, the Hegelian or historiosophical Ketman.

The Polish reception of *The Captive Mind*, however, corrected this omission and firmly associated Milosz with the Hegelian bite. This was not peculiarly Polish. In all communist countries the Hegelian conception of historical necessity, or Engels's conception of a conscious recognition of necessity, was the main argument for a historiosophical acceptance of morally unacceptable realities, and thus the only means of saving oneself from despair. Milosz pointed out that this also had been so according to the Russian nineteenth-century thinker Vissavion Belinsky, who, during a certain phase of life, made use of Hegelian historicism to reconcile himself to the cruelties of Russian life under Nicholas I. Belinsky's case was also invoked by the young Leszek Kolakowski, when speaking in the name of morally sensitive communists who tried to espouse the idea of historical necessity to resolve the conflict between their conscience and the social reality.

The absence of the Hegelian Ketman in *The Captive Mind* can be explained tactically. Milosz could not write about it without betraying his philosophical mentor, Tadeusz Kroński, who was by then a professor in a Party school in Warsaw and would not have wanted to be unmasked. After Kroński's premature death, Milosz's portrait of Kroński's Tiger in *Native Realm* enables us to understand that the Hegelian Ketman, unlike the old Islamic Ketman, was neither a form of prudential mimicry nor of external conformity, allowing for hypocrisy or cynicism. Kroński and Milosz lived in a period of historical crisis, a palingenetic catastrophe comparable to the epoch of the fall of the ancient world and the dawn of Christianity. They saw themselves as pagans belonging to the old world—willing to preserve its best values without denying the historical legitimacy of the new epoch. From this perspective, catastrophe was not just the end of one's own world, but also a regenerative event requiring moral recognition. However, Kroński did not represent the Hegelian Ketman in general, but only an accommodationist version of it. Some features of his character combined with his excessive fear of reactionary forces to pull him in the direction of an over-cautious attitude towards the soul.

In Soviet Russia, the erosion of totalitarian ideocracy was much slower, much more difficult. Its most important form of Ketman was the national one, often combined with the Hegelian Ketman. Milosz thought that Russia, the dominant nation, could not identify directly with the new faith. Nevertheless, for the nationalist Russians, communism had always been a deeply alien and oppressive ideology. They had great difficulties in reconcil-

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ing themselves to it. They needed to help themselves with a dialectical view of history. Communism, they argued, should be supported not for its own sake but as a tool of Russia's national mission. This way of thinking created the widespread, innerly differentiated phenomenon of the so-called national bolshevism—which originated among the Russian émigrés, formerly resolute enemies of bolshevism. Its main ideologist, Nikolai Ustrialov, explained this as a Hegelianized gnosticism that openly challenged the commonsensical interpretation of events. The revolution, he argued, had a hidden meaning: it was the most extreme expression of Russia's defeat and at the same time the beginning of her resurrection through a rejuvenating movement that had to be accepted as the national destiny. He ended up a victim of his double-edged sword, but national bolshevism survived.

The early reception of *The Captive Mind* was dominated by sharp criticism. Both communist believers and anti-communist émigrés saw Milosz's report on life under the Communist regime as a sophisticated lie. The Communists defined it as a masterpiece of hostile propaganda, while the émigrés treated it as an embellishment of the communist reality and a shameless justification of opportunism. Both indignantly rejected the notion of spiritual tyranny. For the Stalinists, communism was a liberation, whereas, for the émigrés, it was merely a system of external coercion. Both militant communists and old style anti-communists demanded clear-cut political commitments and refused to understand the phenomena of dual consciousness and dual identity. The émigré criticism of *The Captive Mind* sometimes was simply a moralistic rejection of dialectical complexities. The best representative of this position was Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, a writer connected with the Paris magazine *Kultura* and the author of *The World Report,* one of the best first-hand accounts of the Soviet gulag before Solzhenitsyn. In his criticism of *The Captive Mind*, he stubbornly repeated that communists had no power to enslave human minds from within and could only apply physical terror and thus force people to lie. The post-Stalinist deideologization made Grudziński's view more and more convincing. For the activists of Solidarity, for whom the main generational experience was Jaruzelski's martial law, Milosz's view of communism as a spiritual tyranny often was unintelligible, whereas Grudziński's dismissal of ideology and emphasis on naked force were immediately acceptable. After all, it was impossible to see Jaruzelski's regime as a militant church capable of imposing ideocratic rule; it was only a weak authoritarian (no longer totalitarian!) regime, unsure of itself, unable to exercise ideological and moral pressure, and thus had to rely on force alone. Now, the opposition effectively organized moral pressure to enforce non-collaboration and to silence dissidents. In this new situation, it was easy to maintain that Milosz's image of communism was mistaken. This paved the way for a newly organized and overt opposition, no longer infrastructural but ostentatiously extrastructural, trying to exert contin-

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uous pressure on the communist rulers from without. Milosz was keenly aware of this and therefore agreed that *The Captive Mind* had become a tale of a barely comprehensible past. I feel, however, that he conceded too much when he concluded that *The Captive Mind* was rather atypical for Poland. I think he was right when he stated that the simpler forms of Ketman, in the sense of role-playing and conscious protective adaptation, had been a mass practice.

In any event, the period of ideocratic totalitarianism was much shorter in Poland than elsewhere. In fact, it ended almost definitively in 1956. The significance of this date was greatly underestimated because public memory became dominated by two groups for whom it was less important than for the population—hard-line anti-communists and ex-Stalinists. Both of them knew little about dual consciousness and internalized ideological oppression: the former because they had always been immune to the new faith; the latter because their commitment to communism had been total. Hence they did not experience the communist ideocracy as a spiritual tyranny. Paradoxically, their deepest experience of the oppressiveness of communism came after its fall, when they found themselves in open conflict with the regime and had to abandon their hopes.

What about Polish society after 1956? Did it make Milosz's book irrelevant? Yes and no. Yes, because the party ceased to behave as a militant church, leaving no space for non-politicized privacy. Marxism ceased to function as the hypnotizing pill of *Murti-Bing*. Control over intellectual life was greatly reduced. Standards of conformity became looser and more pragmatic. But it remained relevant because the system was still dependent on its ideological legitimation and therefore could not free itself from the residual forms of communist ideology. Limitations of freedom were still ideological in nature, or perceived as such, which made them more and more unbearable. And the disappearance of the system was viewed as impossible. This maintained the need to defend one's separate identity as well as to reconcile oneself with systemic necessities; the techniques of coping with this situation were remarkably similar to Ketman. The post-Stalinist Ketman was meaningfully related to the old classical one.

Understandably, the new Ketman flourished, above all within the ruling party. True, the party was no longer terrorized by fanatics; its younger members had not passed through a period of total indoctrination and were contemptuous of the Stalinist past. Nevertheless, they retained a vestigial ideological superego. As a rule this superego was convinced that, in spite of everything, the socialist camp had historical right on its side. Such belief was combined with a cynical attitude toward official propaganda and a lack of illusions about the existing state of affairs. Hence it was not mental captivity in the classical sense. However, the lack of ideological illusions could coexist with the relics of an ideological conscience. Polish party leaders sometimes

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were very cynical about their Soviet counterparts. They tried to outwit them by defending their separate national loyalty but, in doing so, had to cope with the residual conviction that the Soviet Union nevertheless represented historical progress. The Ketman they practiced in relation to Moscow was therefore not just a matter of deceiving the despot. The other form of Ketman set its hopes not on a possible victory of a liberal group within the leadership but on the disintegration of socialism. Hence they could help accelerate the desirable changes while completely distancing themselves from the party and the system's legitimizing ideology. Unlike Ketman, theirs was a conscious effort to liberate intellectual and cultural life from the grip of the official doctrine. But this game required severe rules of self-control and therefore did not allow unrestrained self-expression. It could be effective in transforming the ideological legitimation of the system but refrained from openly challenging it.

The final state in the transformation of consciousness took the form of an ostentatiously public, sometimes intensively provocative, refusal of participation. This form of moral fundamentalism is an indirect confirmation of the validity of Milosz's view of spiritual pressure under communist regimes. Under post-Stalinism this spiritual oppression was greatly weakened and, as a rule, ceased to be internalized, but it was precisely because of this that its residual presence in public life was becoming more and more intolerable. If the oppression were purely external, there would be no need to proclaim the principle of living in truth; if the practice of playing games were not firmly associated with accommodationist attitudes, there would be no justification for moralistic straightforwardness and the anti-politics of symbolic gestures. If the system lacked any moral foundation, as Herling-Grudziński claimed, and did not need any moral support, it would be absurd to hope that it could yield to organized moral pressure. In other words, if Herling-Grudziński were right and communism relied only on physical force, then the collapse of communism could be brought about only by stronger physical force.

To sum up, Milosz's *The Captive Mind* proved to be too pessimistic and, in this sense, wrong. But Milosz's analysis of totalitarianism as a system of spiritual tyranny, above all his presentation of different methods of resisting this tyranny from within, constitute a masterpiece of lasting value. Milosz's concept of Ketman can also be used in a modified version for a better understanding of the long process of detotalitarianization which preceded and made possible the final collapse of the Communist regime. This process was a result of the combined efforts of many groups having different genealogies and using different methods. Therefore, a thoughtful reading of Milosz might promote the much needed mutual understanding and national reconciliation in Poland. Thank you.

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Edith Kurzweil: When Robert Faggen asked me to participate at a conference celebrating Czeslaw Milosz I was pleased, eager to express my admiration for Milosz's courage and *sagesse*—which Milosz himself defines as implying both wisdom and caution. Long before I met him, and before I was associated with *Partisan Review*, I had respected him for speaking the truth about communism, throughout the years when all but a few American intellectuals looked at the Soviet Union through anything but rose-tinted glasses. Unlike Sartre, who said about *The Captive Mind* that Milosz lacked *sagesse*, he had thrown caution to the winds, and had written this wise book.

As Milosz told us at a conference I organized at Rutgers University in 1992, neither the book nor the fact that *Partisan Review* published its prologue helped him get into the United States. "It trailed me for a long time," he recalls in December 1987 in *A Year of the Hunter*, "It elicited denunciations by Poles to the American Embassy in Paris (for being crypto-communist), which meant it wrecked my chances for a visa to America for nine years; it earned me the 'mark of a traitor' among the progressives; and also, something I didn't like at all, it meant I was considered a prose writer, a scholar in the field of political science. *Nota bene*: it did not help me obtain a position as professor of literature; on the contrary." I should add that, upon rereading *The Captive Mind*, I found it to be a prose that comes close to poetry.

Robert Faggen asked me to speak on Milosz's politics. Unlike Adam Michnik, I have not been an active participant in Poland's—or any other country's—liberation, nor am I steeped in the ins and outs of Poland's Marxism, as are Andrzej Walicki and Irena Grudzińska-Gross. Instead, I will talk about the American reception of Milosz's prose. To be sure, Milosz's genius is most evident in his poetry, which manages to convey exactly and yet elusively the preoccupations and malaise of our times—call it the human condition, our universal preoccupations, or whatever else you like—which so few of our contemporaries have fully grasped in its contradictions, or have envisioned from his penetrating comparative perspective. Both an insider and an outsider, Milosz has succeeded in being appreciative as well as critical of our culture: he is a marginal individual in the best sense, and uses this marginality to point to truths most people either miss or aren't willing to express.

To begin with, however, I want to mention Milosz's connection to *Partisan Review*. He recalls, as does William Phillips, that they first met in Paris, around 1949, at the home of Mac and Sheba Goodman. Phillips says in his memoir, *A Partisan Life*, that the Goodmans "cultivated many of the European refugees from Germany and Russia." And he goes on to describe *The Captive Mind* as

> impressive in its description of the control of totalitarian countries. . . . [Milosz] was one of the few European political figures I had met

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> who were not monolithic in their thinking. Perhaps as a poet as well as a political person, he was flexible and was aware of the dimensions of doubt and of all the intellectual modulations in the area where literary and political questions cross.

By then, Milosz had been living in America (from 1946 to 1950), and this was Phillips's first extended stay in Paris. Milosz was tormented: to return to a Poland that was crushed or defect to an America where he mostly found people whose minds were "unreal." Phillips, on the other hand, was stunned by the French intellectuals he encountered "at the underground bar of the Hôtel Royale, which was where they met while the tourists were looking for [Sartre] at the Flore or the Deux Magots." Although *Partisan Review* had introduced new French thinking to America immediately after the war, by 1949 French intellectuals had not only become anti-American, but ideological to the point of refusing to admit the totalitarian nature of the Soviet Union and its dangerous aims. Both Milosz and Phillips—joined by no more than a handful of people, among them Camus, Koestler, Sperber, and Aron—though critical of the corruption that is inherent almost inevitably in capitalism and consumerism, were not blind to what Stalinism entailed. Milosz, of course, knew it first-hand. He recalls:

> I read a great deal, including Louis Adamic, who had emigrated from his native Lubljana at age thirteen and became in America a writer of the insulted and the injured, workers of Slavic origin. Apparently alone among Poles at the time, I devoted myself to discriminating reading in English: Henry Miller, *Partisan Review*, and the least orthodox journal of the New York intellectuals, *Politics*, which Dwight Macdonald bankrolled with his wife's money. That's also when I met Dwight.

Milosz's subsequent meetings with Dwight, Mary McCarthy, and Nicola Chiaromonte (who reviewed *The Captive Mind* for us), helped make "at least one sector of America understandable and close to [him]: the New York intellectuals of an anti-totalitarian bent." I don't think Milosz then could have realized how upset these intellectuals would be for the next few years, caught between the wild reactionary anti-Communism of McCarthy and the fellow travelers and liberals, most of whom were naive in their hopes for peace and refused to recognize the realities of the Cold War.

While looking through the index of *Partisan Review*, I could not help but note that Milosz, in spite of what I might call this "elective affinity," did not write for us after his arrival in the United States. Upon finding the

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correspondence in the archives, I too understood. Phillips knew that Milosz had to support himself by writing and thus could not afford to live on what we pay (writers still can't). Later on we excerpted parts of *Starting from my Europe, Beginning with My Streets*, and *A Year of the Hunter,* and in recent years 1988, 1992, and 1996, I met Milosz at some conferences. The only thing I was disappointed in was that Milosz could not come to what really was the first conference of dissidents, which we held in Boston in 1981. I found a note in the archives. Of course, ours was a far cry from the posh Wheatfield junket on the Gettys' private plane to Lisbon five years later, but Siniavski, Voinovich, Kott, Nekrasov, Baranczak, Kolakowski, and Aksyonov, among others, did come.

That was when I learned what was going on in the minds of people who had come from there. They still displayed fears of reprisal by the KGB. They didn't want to get on the same plane from Boston to New York; they left hotel rooms we paid for unoccupied; and at first they even wondered at my motives for inviting them. Anyway, I can only guess at the fears and mixed emotions Milosz must have experienced when he decided to defect so many years earlier. And at the lack of comprehension he found around him afterwards. Yes, "good little Czeslaw," as he calls himself at that time, "could not renounce his loyalty." He had left behind more than a regime—extended family, language, homeland, friends, familiar surroundings—he chose to be *dépaysé*. I guess I'm particularly sympathetic when I realize that, in spite of having been sent away from Vienna on a children's transport, having lost my four grandparents and dozens of other relatives to the Holocaust, I cannot help feeling inexplicably comfortable when I get back to Vienna; I remain as attuned to antisemitism as to Strauss valses. I assume that the multi-lingual Milosz continues to write in Polish, the language of his childhood, because he knows (and has said) that some of one's innermost feelings are bound to get lost in translation.

It may well be that this is why I take to his criticism of the liberal intelligentsia's currently wished for "unified world view," which, as he says, makes for the disappearance of the distinction "between the enlightened—the knowledgeable, the progressive, the mentally liberated—and the so-called masses." For no one truly at home in more than one culture, I believe, can help but question the certainty with which some of our well-meaning liberal thinkers defend the *dumbing down* of our schools, our television, our newspapers. Actually, it is when you go abroad, and are able to truly understand the customs that underpin people's languages, and their usages, that you realize why Americans often appear so naive overseas. Milosz mentions that in passing, when he invokes history. In *Starting from My Europe*, for instance, he talks of "the direct pressure of History, with a capital H. . .that may reveal itself in a detail of architecture, in the shaping of a landscape, even in trees like

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those oaks close to my birthplace which remember my pagan ancestors. . . [recalling] the presence of past generations."

At a conference at Adelphi University, Milosz said of memory: "We have no other means of knowing about phases of our civilization, of our time, of the nineteenth century, for instance, than through literature. Literature fixes those certain phases. The function of poetry and of fiction's memory is very important." Joseph Brodsky had died a few days before, and Milosz let us print obituary remarks he was about to make at a memorial service. He said of his friend that "by his *oeuvre* and by his life [Brodsky] reminded us, against what today is so often proclaimed and written, that hierarchy exists. . .that by living and writing, we affirm it every day anew. . . .[it] means respect for that which is elevated and unconcern, rather than scorn, for that which is base." Brodsky, Milosz stated, was not directly "concerned with the social and the ethical. Paradoxically, he developed his art under the ultimate social and ethical pressure, that of the Soviet state, but he was free, and he moved in his own realm. Why? Because he served the elemental force of the Russian language." Another time, when speaking of "The Writer and the University," Milosz noted that writing the history of literature, for instance Polish literature, depends on who, when, and where it is being written—whether it is being interpreted by a Pole living under Marxist rule, or an American professor of Polish literature.

I first met Milosz at my Rutgers conference in 1992. William Phillips moderated the first panel, whose participants were to be Joseph Brodsky, Saul Bellow, and Ralph Ellison. When Brodsky didn't show up on time, Milosz was a good sport and went on instead. After Brodsky arrived, he joined in, and by the end of that session Milosz remarked that whenever he himself spoke of Central Europe Brodsky would say Western Asia—but that what unites the countries of the zone between Germany and Russia is their turbulent past and a common heritage that is displayed in, for instance, their architecture. Brodsky, in his typically ironic manner, thought that "Eastern Europe" would not be defined as a nostalgic realm between two empires, or as a leftover of the Hapsburg Empire, but by its unpleasant economic realities. They also differed on the role of the church. Unlike their American listeners, many of whom still lump both Poland and the Soviet Union among others into the countries behind the Iron Curtain, they focused on the complexities and the differences, and they respected one another enormously despite these rather small disagreements. I think that's what probably cemented their friendship.

In the session on "Intellectual's Notes from Underground," Milosz focused on the difference between dissidence and resistance. Adam Michnik, for instance, was a dissident while he was imprisoned, but he was aware that there was a community of dissidents against the government and thus he wasn't alone. Having a community, however small, for whom

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Milosz himself could write after his defection, he said, probably made him feel less alone than Camus, who, after having published *L'homme révolté (Essays 1945-1951)*, was advised by Sartre that, if he liked neither communism nor capitalism, he could go to the Galapagos Islands.

In 1992, Milosz foresaw the resurgence of patriotic, ethnocentric feelings in the "former communist countries," which led to the belief that the state should be owned by one ethnically pure group. Milosz considered ethnocentric pressures identical to the pressures of nationalistic doctrines; tribal prejudices hidden in customs and traditional mores—as exemplified in "the former Yugoslavia." He described the mixture of communist and nationalistic propaganda as being extremely dangerous for an individual, not because he would be punished by the authorities, but because he would be ostracized by the community. He said that this sort of dissidence from the prevailing mood was new in that part of the world, and people were completely unaware of it. Of course, Milosz was denoting the dilemmas and ambiguities of dissidence, the blurring of lines between dissidence and resistance.

At the 1986 PEN Congress in New York, Milosz pointed out that writers direct their hostility against the state if that state won't offer a utopian promise, and that they censor other writers who do not tacitly accept these norms of behavior. Basically, this was updating one of the themes in *The Captive Mind*, of which many of the PEN participants then seemed unaware. But writers must call a spade a spade. For:

> Innumerable millions of human beings were killed in this century in the name of utopia—either progressive or reactionary, and always there were writers who provided convincing justifications for massacre. . . . Recently I read, in a French translation, an article by a West German literary critic glorifying Sartre for his assault on Camus, but not mentioning what was really at stake. Camus's offense was mentioning the existence of gulags. Sartre was concerned with injustice in his world and unwilling to pity millions of victims sacrificed in the name of a presumed historical necessity.

I am closing on this note, because *Partisan Review* all along has been concerned with these issues, and has printed many pieces that didn't fit the *parti-pris* positions of either the so-called right or left. I have spent much time in Europe and thus have realized that the line between the so-called right and left never was as clear as it was presented to us. Milosz knew of these matters early on, of the unwillingness of the Western left to deal with the ambiguities, and of its need to come to terms with utopias. In

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other words, History with a capital H is important. Yes, I would say every generation retells its story in its own way. Nevertheless, now that communism no longer is a threat, we have to face how we have internalized its utopian promises. I think we are short-changing future generations by replacing communism with, for instance, literary obfuscations that have become fashionable in the academy, rather than teaching also the history of events that distinguish fact from fiction. But Milosz has been telling us all that for a long, long time. Now let's celebrate him for it.

Irena Grudzińska-Gross: I will not speak about the politics of *The Captive Mind*. The book survived its subject. The interesting question for us today might be why, even though communism is gone, the book remains so important. I think that is because it is a most unusual political book. It does not discuss party manifestos, theoretical texts of Karl Marx or Plekhanov, and the analysis of communism it presents is based on a wonderful and absurd novel, *Insatiability,* by a Polish writer, Stanislaw Witkiewicz. In its main part *The Captive Mind* consists of portraits of four or even five concrete and recognizable persons. Indeed, even though it attacks the people it describes, this is a book that speaks about friendship.

In a letter to Thomas Merton, Milosz wrote, "That book was written *in extremis* by a poet who could not address foreign language readers in verse and hesitated between two aims: to convey the meaning of the 'Eastern' experience to those not acquainted with it, and *to tell the truth* (my emphasis) to his colleagues in Poland." The book was an explanation not so much of communism itself as of why certain Eastern European writers and intellectuals felt attracted to it. It was also a farewell letter of one choosing exile and rupturing his relations to his country. He addressed the West, but also spoke to the people he left behind. His book was a summation, an accusation, a self-revelation. It was not the first text Milosz wrote after choosing exile. In May of 1951, in the émigré monthly *Kultura*, he published a fifteen-page article entitled "No" ("Nie"). In it, he expressed the themes he developed later in *The Captive Mind*: "What I'm going to tell now could well be called a story of a suicide," he began. The suicide in question was his decision to emigrate, which Milosz feared would prevent him from writing. He left Poland when there was little contact between the two political blocs and when it was believed that, in order to write, the poet needed to be immersed in his mother tongue. Thus, the dramatic effect of this opening sentence should be taken seriously: the gamble was real. But he could have intended other meanings of the word "suicide." One possible meaning was the suicide of Western culture which was both the perpetrator and victim of World War II. In fact, the catastrophe of that war is one basis of *The Captive Mind*. The other suicide was the joining by the French intellectuals of

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victorious communism. The article "Nie" and *The Captive Mind* were angry accusations meant to scare the French away from the embrace of the new ideology. The subject of suicide addresses "the vulnerability of the twentieth-century mind to seduction by socio-political doctrines and its readiness to accept totalitarian terror for the sake of a hypothetical future." *The Captive Mind* explores the deeper causes of longing for even "the most illusory certainty." Indeed, it is the mind, the individual, that Milosz focuses on.

The book's structure is unusual. It speaks about "the history of the last decades in Central and Eastern Europe which abounds in situations in regards to which all epithets and theoretical considerations lose meaning." Its opening chapters consist of elements of the history and nature of communism and it ends with a defense of the Baltic people. But its core is composed of case studies. They analyze and describe concrete lives and people who succumbed to the Hegelian temptation. The identity of four concrete men is hidden behind Greek letters and the fifth person is nicknamed Ketman. The Greek letters denoting various characters and the Arabic term (borrowed from Gobineau) suggest a certain universality of the cases and a moral lesson that could be drawn from them. Yet the portraits do not present clear-cut styles of behavior. They consist of very specific stories. The author does not offer moral conclusions: his is an angry voice weaving accusation with elements of compassion and justification. All five people are flawed characters facing the unprecedented ravages of triumphant totalitarianism. They are exposed, even condemned, but without finality. They still could be, and in one case were, redeemed. Tadeusz Kroński is the Marxist philosopher portrayed and universalized under the name of Ketman. Tadeusz Borowski, author of *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentleman,* is well known in the United States, and at a young age died a suicide. Gamma stood for the failed writer, Jerzy Putrament, who turned party *apparatchik*. The poet Konstanty Ildefons Galczyński is described in the chapter about Delta. And the most important portrait is that of Alpha, or Jerzy Andrzejewski, best known as the author of *Ashes and Diamonds*. Milosz knew them all, they were writers, his "brothers-in-trade." He knew Gamma from his student years and had an important intellectual friendship with Ketman, but his relationship with Alpha was extraordinary and special. Milosz, his wife Janka, and Alpha/Andrzejewski passed the war years together. It was a wonderful friendship, which must have saved all three from total despair. They traveled, conspired, and drank together. They read, wrote, and laughed. In reading both Milosz's and Andrzejewski's reminiscences of the period, one is struck by a certain aura of happiness that seems almost impossible in such bleak times. The post-war difference in attitudes of both friends towards the Communist regime, according to Milosz, resulted not so much from the divergent political worldviews as from the dissimilarities in their characters. Andrzejewski wanted to be a moral authority and had

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a weakness for moral extremes. Milosz held onto his distance, a critical self-appraisal which saved him from total immersion into communism. After a few years, the ways of the friends parted. In *The Captive Mind,* the most bitter chapter was devoted to Alpha: "The man I call Alpha is one of the best known prose writers east of the Elbe. He was a close friend of mine and memories of many difficult moments that we went through together tie us to each other. I find it hard to remain unmoved when I recall him. I even asked myself if I should subject him to this analysis but I shall do so because friendship would not prevent me from writing an article on his books in which I would say more or less what I shall say here."

Why did Milosz write about these people? Why did he write about communism through individual portraits? For one thing, he is a poet, and, with his uncanny ability he was trying to capture the lived reality. For another, he tried to show Western intellectuals the betrayal and travails of their East European counterparts. But both of these answers, although true, are incomplete. What Milosz did was to write critically about his friends within the historically and culturally defined tradition of friendship. Friendship is not only a feeling of mutual well-wishing between people but also a brotherhood among groups of people who are united by similarities of age and origin as well as by elective affinities and public responsibilities. Friendship, like marriage, combines an intimate rapport with social duties. Friends share the idea of service, of participation in and responsibility for public life; they are united by an external value, be it God, country, honor, or art. Friendship as affinity between social subjects has functioned in European history from the time of Aristotle. Important writings on friendship by Plato, Cicero, and Montaigne were transmitted through education in European and therefore also Polish culture. The Enlightenment and later on Romanticism transformed the idea of friendship between a couple of "brothers" into that of friendship of a group of like-minded men, linked by loyalty and united in the circle of those who pursue justice. The Masonic movement, secret student circles, and associations embodied the social forms of friendship. The young Milosz grew up with this background. Already in high school, he belonged to PET, a secret student organization. At the University of Vilnius, with its tradition of secret societies and Mickiewicz circles, Milosz belonged to the Vagabond Club and to a circle of philology students. Later, he was associated with the informal literary group Zagary. Milosz himself acknowledged the extreme importance of early friendships for his development as a writer. Andrzejewski and Milosz knew each other well before the war. Their relationship, however, developed fully during the war in times of extreme danger. Humor and alcohol played a very important role in that friendship. Indeed, no history of Polish male friendships could be written without a long chapter about drinking. Both writers, but especially Alpha, were deeply involved in dangerous underground literary work.

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Loyalty was necessary during wartime. Andrzejewski wrote about loyalty to the nation and loyalty to friends in his wartime fiction. Of course, where there's loyalty there's also betrayal. Alpha was bitterly disappointed with Polish authorities in exile. Then history came to Poland in the shape of the Red Army and all loyalties were broken. It was not unreasonable to be convinced that the war demanded dramatic payback in the form of social revolution. War's devastations warranted a new beginning and radical change. Alpha embraced that change without the cool distance that characterized Milosz.

In another letter to Merton, Milosz writes that *The Captive Mind* was both an explosion of long-contained fury and an act of cold vengeance. These, I believe, were caused by the humiliation Milosz felt due to the devastation the new regime brought on the people—who already had gone through so much, and who sought only peace and inner harmony. But he directed his anger towards his colleagues. "Telling the truth" was meant to punish them as well. "For Alpha my chapter about him was a blow," Milosz wrote. Yet six years later they were friends again. Andrzejewski had become a political dissident. The end of Stalinism, and perhaps Milosz's book as well, changed his political attitude. At least this was Milosz's intention behind the writing of the chapter about Alpha and what he believed happened. He was angry, but, as he said in another letter to Merton, he wrote also out of love. "In fact I love those people against whom I directed my anger much more than I show." He felt responsible for them, for his friends and colleagues in Poland, and this is why he wrote.

As this gathering shows, Milosz has a gift for friendship. Several of his books, such as *The ABC Book,* are acts of friendship. *The ABC Book* is a monument to those he survived. His wartime relationship with Alpha was based on loyalty and on public service but, in the Aristotelian tradition, the highest kind of friendship is based on truth. In *The Captive Mind,* at the exorbitant price of exile, *in extremis,* he decided to tell the truth, and it turned out to have been the right decision. He liberated his mind from the captivity of anger and contempt, and saved his friendship with Alpha. He helped those he exposed—his colleagues in Poland—because by writing about them he made their struggles heroic. Truth turned out to be more fruitful than loyalty, or rather, truth became a form of loyalty and the highest form of friendship.

Adam Michnik: I'm not going to torture you in English. I will try to do it in Polish. I am full of uncertainty and humility. It's not easy to talk about one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century, not being a literary critic, nor about a man who's primarily a poet while discussing a book that is a philosophical and political text as well as practical theology. For thirty-five years, since I first read this book, its motto has been with me. It is the saying of an old Jew from the foothills of the Carpathian mountains: if two

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are quarreling and one of them is sixty percent right that's wonderful. If he is seventy-five percent right, well, that's suspicious or suspect. But if he's one hundred percent right you know that he's a lout, a thief, and a robber. I'm sure I won't be one hundred percent right in what I say here.

Milosz is like the Pacific Ocean: it looks wonderful but you can drown in it. For instance, in 1980 someone offered me a book published by the underground of the Nazi occupation in Poland—a small book by Jacques Maritain, *Down the Roads of Defeat*. It had been translated for the anti-Nazi underground by Czeslaw Milosz. This book also appeared as one of the first publications under martial law in Poland in 1981.

It's dangerous to talk about Milosz. It's too easy to fall into the trap of symbols. He is associated with everything for everybody. Poles are Catholics, and therefore have to have a holy trinity. So in 1980 we first had the Pope, then we had Walesa, and there was a need for a third. Then, a good Jewish god who loves Poland saw to it that Milosz got the Nobel Prize. This is the empirical proof that those who believe in the holy trinity are right.

In the last issue of *Zeszty Literackie*, there's a short statement by Wojciech Karpinski stating that that it's a great pleasure to live in the era of Milosz. I believe that too. At the same time, I am aware that one could create a huge anthology based on pamphlets and pieces of journalism written against Milosz, titled *From the Works of Polish Paranoia*. And this is typical of Milosz's fate. He's a poet of great suffering. Great harm and unfairness befell him from his countrymen. I would say, to use Adam Zagajewski's expression, that he is a poet of solidarity and solitude. It's not easy for me to talk about all this in his presence. *The Captive Mind* is a controversial book. For some, it's a de-masking and accusing book. For others, it's a book outlining the base and deceptive nature of communism, a book written at a desk to justify the fear and the moral compromises of intellectuals who served despotism out of self-interest. For me, it is first and foremost a testimony of those times. But it's also a warning for all of us in post-Communist Eastern Europe. This tale, the story of the mind enslaved by communism, reaches a specific actuality and relevance when the mind is threatened on the one side by nihilism and on the other by anti-communism. In *The Captive Mind,* Milosz says that those who now sleep in their beds or give themselves up to idiotic entertainments in the face of the horrors of the world, through every one of their acts, earn destruction. I think that this book still addresses these people today. (There is always a majority of them in my country.)

Yesterday, we spoke about the Indonesian poet who found *The Captive Mind* the best description of the situation of the Indonesian intellectual. When I was talking about it to Heinrich Böll in 1977, he said that when he read it during the Cold War it seemed to him one of the many products of the fear of communism. In 1977, the book seemed like an accurate

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description of the problem of German intellectuals. In other words, each of us while we read this book felt like the ichthyologist who was just spoken to by a fish, a rather specific fish. Milosz isn't a former prisoner of the gulag describing the inhuman conditions on this earth. He isn't a Marxist intellectual communist contrasting the theory and practice of communism like Koestler, Silone, or Weissberg. He isn't someone who has survived a shock and is now coming out and telling the whole truth. In the case of Milosz, we can't speak of a lack of knowledge about the situation in the gulags nor of a naive belief in communist propaganda or identification with communist ideology. The author of *The Captive Mind* knew all these things, and, in spite of that, was subject to the bite of Hegelianism. That is the place from which Milosz tells the story. The narrator is a man who is tempted, but not all the way, not seduced. And for that reason he was able to tell the story of those who succumbed to temptation. But why should Milosz be subject to temptation? These days this question is a bit embarrassing, since every child knows that communism was some kind of terrible and idiotic thing. That is the problem Poland has with Milosz. It can't write that he was right, since every child knows that there was no captive mind in Poland, just a band of traitors who served Stalin, and that all of Poland was just sitting there behind the scenes and conspiring. But it also can't say that Milosz was not right because Milosz is the bard and the holy trinity. Milosz quite accurately describes the road to temptation—the decomposition, the decay of Weimar civilization, Hitler in power in the thirties. The metaphor about the end of the Roman Empire returns: one world is ending, the barbarians are coming.

In Berkeley, I asked Milosz, "Czeslaw, did you expect the end of communism?" "No. I learned of it not from Marx but from Witkacy." Actually, Witkacy turned out to be an excellent guide to Poland under communism. In the poem "Central Park," Milosz describes a strategy for the arrival of the barbarians, and communism is the barbarian *Zeitgeist*. Spiritual emptiness is its ally, the sense of the absurd, which brings forth the need for radical change, for a new man. And the final bite, the tooth of Hegel, is the necessity of history. Just as the Roman Empire fell, so does Western civilization today. And the tempted replies, or the tempter: if we are to be in this hell of barbarians it's better to be the devil that pushes that little soul into hell than to be one of the little souls that is pushed down. For the narrator of *The Captive Mind,* there was no other way of thinking. There was no way to create Polish democracy, an émigré, or old Polish democracy. In *The Toast*, he severely criticizes both the second Polish republic and the émigré world. Finally, Milosz's narrator rejects ethnic nationalism as an alternative to communism. If communism was for Lenin the rule of the Soviets and electrification in rural areas, for Milosz it is a religious sect, a mafia. Both are essential. Fanaticism and banditry distinguish the Bolshevik sect.

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In 1981, after the introduction of martial law, someone asked in an underground paper about what happened in Poland on December 13, when a band of gangsters attacked an insane asylum. In *The Captive Mind,* Milosz describes how in 1945 gangsters, endowed with ideological fanaticism, seized power—just as Islamic fundamentalists stormed the American embassy in Tehran. Aided by Soviet tanks, they took over three Baltic states in the name of peace. This is a key moment in the book, because it allows for many dialectical somersaults. Milosz shows how everything can be rationalized in the name of historical necessity, national interest, self interest. But three Baltic countries were overrun. At that point in the book Milosz basically chokes. This is the bone in your throat, whether you are pro-communist or anti-communist. Being concerned with the fate of the Balts meant basically giving up any sort of political strategy. *The Captive Mind* is a subtle description of temptation, the repulsiveness of power, and the nothingness of Soviet Communism. But it is also a sort of dialogue with the tempter that ends with the rejection of temptation.

The ending of this book has the power and passion of a great improvisation of the *Dziady* of Mickiewicz. Mickiewicz came into conflict with God, Milosz with the *Zeitgeist*. This boils down to whether we can accept sheer force for its own sake. The book describes the techniques of accepting this power and of dressing it up in various truths. In this process of enslaving the human mind, writes Milosz, people behave like the man who wants to scream in his sleep but can't get out a sound—not only because he can't say anything, but because he doesn't know what to say. Paradoxically, this supports the testimonies that were written at that time and hidden away in drawers. I tried to put them into a book, *The History of Honor in Poland* or the *Registry of Honor.* Milosz describes the four silhouettes of writers who succumbed to enslavement. I wrote about four silhouettes of writers who opposed and resisted enslavement. They confirmed Milosz's observations: there was no consistent way to construct a consistent historiosophy, opposed to this historical necessity. In other words, you can argue that it's no longer worth crying over the murdered Incas or Prussians. The civilization of Europe, after all, has been built on the blood of innocents. Is it hypocrisy to object to those who are now trying to build a new civilization of communism by defending contemporary Prussians or Aztecs, specifically Lithuanians and Latvians, by saying that human rights are abused? That means opposing everyone. That's what Milosz did. Of course, he incurred the wrath of the ruling communists and émigré national orthodoxy, which he rejected. And he condemned antisemitism, which is rare in Polish literature. He found himself without defenders.

Milosz returned to primary values, to the harmed simple man, to ordinary truth and ordinary lies, ordinary good and evil. He often says, "I was on track to do exactly what Alpha/Andrzejewski did. What saved me was some

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internal voice, a voice which said, 'It's better to stick with common sense and the religion of the forefathers than with dialectical historiosophy or patriotic orthodoxy.'" Milosz didn't know whether communism would turn out to be a historical necessity. But common sense told him that even if communism were to win, it wouldn't bring any good to people. He knew that even though Lithuanian and Polish peasants may be illiterate, they're not repulsive smelly idiots to whom Russian commissars will teach wisdom. Milosz says to the reader, "It's better to listen to an internal voice than to the voice of the tempter who proposes Ketman and in this manner convinces that the winning tyranny must be served just because it is the winning side." This sentence for many years helped me to live: "I'm not interested in whether I find myself on the side of future winners or not." Milosz doesn't idealize or glorify anyone, least of all himself. This shows that the book wasn't dreamed up at a desk. It contains real pain, suffering, shame, anger, hot blood. "I'm homeless," Milosz says, and in some way he stayed homeless—even though, for decades, he cared for and built a new house for his native Europe. He said that "eyes that have seen shouldn't be closed; hands which have touched shouldn't forget when they hold a pen." At a certain moment, the conflicts with a totalitarian dictatorship stop being a matter of intellectual debate. They become a test of character. The ONR [Radical Nationalist Camp] is the heir of the Party and Milosz is the descendant of Mickiewicz, and between them stood only governments worthy of contempt.

Robert Faggen: Thank you very much. All of you have said that this is an unusual book of political science or political sociology because it does not blame a system or a set of ideas but emphasizes the importance of the individual who makes decisions. And how has that characterized either the appeal or some of the resistance to the book?

Andrzej Walicki: I think it condemns all totalitarianist systems—tyrannies that are not merely external but attempting to impose mental captivity. So I agree with Irena Grudzińska-Gross that this is not an expression of hate but an attempt to understand Polish fellow-travellers as victims of the system rather than as individuals guilty of personal failures.

Edith Kurzweil: I would say it's a bit of both insofar as it indicates that we all function within a system. But when that system is coercive it's difficult to be courageous. Still, ultimately we have to be courageous or ought to be, so it's political science up to a point, but not really.

Irena Grudzińska-Gross: I don't think that Milosz presented these four characters as victims of communism. He showed how they reacted to and

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often stood up to a horrible situation after the second world war, which was an unprecedented catastrophe. Actually, in each case, he looked for character flaws to see why they succumbed to temptation. What moves us is the combination of deep and intelligent analyses of the political system and the fight for survival of people who couldn't win.

Adam Michnik: I think we have to read this book along with Thomas Mann's two novels, *The Magic Mountain* and *Doctor Faustus*.

Robert Faggen: Adam, at one point you distinguished between the narrator of *The Captive Mind* and Milosz. Could you distinguish between Milosz's rejection of the *Zeitgeist* and the vision of historical necessity underneath that troubles him, while preserving some idea of history as a meaningful process?

Adam Michnik: I think that the typical reader of the book is someone from Western Europe or America who doesn't understand the experience of communism or of Central and Eastern Europe. The narrator of *The Captive Mind* is more direct than Milosz the poet, although the book contains nothing that Milosz didn't write about earlier in his verse. To me it's a novel, since there is no identification of the author with the narrator. Since the war Poles spoke amongst themselves in code language. Twenty years later, that code is illegible to strangers, and even to Poles. *The Captive Mind* is the first book in which the story of those times is decoded.

Andrzej Walicki: Adam, you minimized the difference between Herling-Grudziński and Milosz. You explained it away by saying that both writers stood for primordial values against the *Zeitgeist*, which still is crucial for both.

Adam Michnik: Andrzej Walicki is a classical intellectual who listened to my presentation without the decoder. If he had it, he would know that my entire presentation was fundamentally a polemic with Herling-Grudziński. The formulations about a book dreamed up at a desk are quotations from Herling-Grudziński in *Journal Written at Night*. I have spoken about this with Herling many times. I couldn't change his mind. I'm one hundred percent on the side of Milosz, and Grudziński believes that the fascination with communism can be explained by fear. I always asked him, "Who were you afraid of, Gustaw, when you were communizing before the war? Who were you afraid of when participating in illegal communist affairs?" In that sense I agree with Andrzej Walicki. But the problem of many people is believing that what is obvious for them should be obvious for the whole world. Since Gustaw described the gulags, he thought anyone having anything to do with communism was either an idiot or a lout. He couldn't understand that it's possible to

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think differently. So, for Herling, moral condemnation is sufficient. But for me there's nothing more interesting than to walk in someone else's shoes. I recently read Rauschning's *Revolution of Nihilism*. That book is worth reading along with *The Captive Mind*. Nothing is quite as interesting as trying to understand why so many people followed Hitler. It's not enough for me to say that he was a criminal. That would be sufficient were I preparing a coup against him, but to understand the force and phenomenon of Hitler is to understand the susceptibility to nationalism. I have to think of Hitler's values. So, in the sense that Milosz is a decoder, Herling-Grudziński is not. On the other hand, the aspect of the mind enslaved by national ideology doesn't satisfy me in *The Captive Mind*. Milosz very well describes how Bolshevik faith tempts, as if he were sensitive to it. However, for the temptation of national socialism, Milosz only has words of contempt, because he's deaf to it. When it comes to national fundamentalist ideologies, he is an inspirer but no longer a decoder. Here I rather encourage reading Rauschning and Thomas Mann.

Edith Kurzweil: I'm half afraid to disagree with Adam Michnik, because he always wins. However, I did not read the book as a novel. It probably was different for people in the West, who did not know the earlier writings of Milosz. I read it as his way of separating from his country or of coming to terms with his own situation as well as that of his country, while at the same time informing people in the West, and maybe hoping against hope that he might enlighten them. Certainly, for open-minded intellectuals, this book was an eye-opener. I think that is why we're still discussing it, why we see it as a classic, and why it survives. And it's going to survive however long people read. Milosz explained something we needed to know. Maybe he wants to say what he really thought, whether he was the narrator or a character.

Adam Michnik: Better not now, since then our whole defense makes no sense. At the end, but not too decidedly.

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EDWARD HIRSCH AND ADAM ZAGAJEWSKI

Robert Faggen: This evening we're going to hear two poets read. **Edward Hirsch**, who received the National Book Critics Circle Award for *Wild Gratitude* in 1986, in many ways writes in the vein of Milosz. He too attempts to capture the world and all of its objects, people, and scenery, and to create a memory of these objects. **Adam Zagajewski** was born in Lwow, Poland. He tends to create shadows of the past, a past that still haunts Poland. He has written a wide variety of works, including three books of poetry, a book of essays, and one book of prose and poetry.

Edward Hirsch: It's a great pleasure to be here to honor a poet we all admire so much. It's also an honor for me to be reading with Adam Zagajewski, whose poems I value deeply. One of the side benefits of this conference is the pleasure of having so many American and Polish intellectuals meet. Somewhere, when I was a teenager in Chicago, it struck me that something like this must exist, so I am grateful to Robert Faggen and Czeslaw Milosz for bringing us together. Adam and I thought that we might begin by reading a few poems both in Polish and in English. This poem is called "And Yet the Books." [Reads poem; Zagajewski reads in Polish.]

Today, Bob Hass gently corrected me when I spoke about Milosz's survivor's guilt to point out that the poems also have something which he calls "survivor's wonder." That is true. One of the poems exemplifying this quality of survivor's wonder is "Encounter." It ends with that extraordinary line, "I ask not out of sorrow, but in wonder." It was written in Wilno in 1936. Milosz had survivor's wonder even before the war. You might even say that survivor's wonder is a kind of metaphysical state, as well as an historical one. "Caffé Greco."

In the eighties of the twentieth century, in Rome, via Condotti
We were sitting with Turowicz in the Caffé Greco
And I spoke in, more or less, these words:

—We have seen much, comprehended much.
States were falling, countries passed away.
Chimeras of the human mind besieged us
And made people perish or sink into slavery.
The swallows of Rome made me wake up at dawn
And I feel then transitoriness, the lightness
Of detaching myself. Who I am, who I was
Is not so important. Because others,
Noble-minded, great, sustain me
Anytime I think of them. Of the hierarchy of beings.
Those who gave testimony to their faith,

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Whose names are erased or trampled to the ground
Continue to visit us. [. . .]

These poems read so beautifully that I'm getting the eerie feeling they're written in English and being translated into Polish! The last poems in *The Collected Poems* are called "Six Lectures in Verse." I just will read "Lecture VI."

Boundless history lasted in that moment
When he was breaking bread and drinking wine.
They were being born, they desired, they died.
My God, what crowds! How is it possible
That all of them wanted to live and are no more? [. . .]

I wrote this next one, called "The Poet at Seven"; it's a sonnet. I have a strong sense that my identities as an American and a Jew are going in different directions: my identity as an American takes me forward, but my identity as a Jewish person takes me backwards, because Judaism has such a strong sense of history. There is no Judaism without history, and you might say there's no American *with* history. I took the title from Rimbaud. But in the tenor of our proceedings, perhaps, Rimbaud was influenced by Milosz. "The Poet at Seven."

He could be any seven-year old on the lawn,
holding a baseball in his hand, ready to throw,
He has the middle-class innocence of an American,

except for his blunt features and dark skin
that mark him as a Palestinian or a Jew,
his forehead furrowed like a question,

his concentration camp eyes, nervous, grim,
and too intense. He has the typical
blood of the exile, the refugee, the victim.

Look at him looking at the catcher for a sign—
so violent and competitive, so unexceptional,
except for an ancestral lamentation,

a shadowy, grief-stricken need for freedom
laboring to express itself through him.

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I didn't discover Simone Weil through Czeslaw Milosz, but I've been greatly heartened by his admiration for her, and I admire his essay about her philosophy. Since I've been reading her philosophy I've been deeply influenced by it and also carry on a quarrel with it. But I love her notion that attentiveness is the natural prayer of the soul. Anyway, my poem is about the year she worked in a factory. In my poem there are several quotations from her essay "The Mysticism of Work." She says, "To work in order to eat, to eat in order to work," and, "Through work, man turns himself into matter, as Christ does through the Eucharist. Work is like a death; we have to pass through death, we have to be killed." "Simone Weil: The Year of Factory Work, 1934-1935."

A glass of red wine trembles on the table,
Untouched, and lamplight falls across her shoulders.

She looks down at the cabbage on her plate,
She stares at the broken bread. Proposition:

The irreducible slavery of workers. "To work
In order to eat, to eat in order to work."

She thinks of the punchclock in her chest,
Of night deepening in the bindweed and crabgrass,

In the vapors and atoms, in the factory
Where a steel vise presses against her temples

Ten hours per day. She doesn't eat.
She doesn't sleep. She almost doesn't think

Now that she has brushed against the bruised
Arm of oblivion and tasted the blood, now

That the furnace has labelled her skin
And branded her forehead like a Roman slave's.

Surely God comes to the clumsy and inefficient,
To welders in dark spectacles, and unskilled

Workers who spend their allotment of days
Pulling red-hot metal bobbins from the flames.

Surely God appears to the shattered and anonymous,
To the humiliated and afflicted.

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Whose legs are married to perpetual motion
And whose hands are too small for their bodies.

Proposition: "Through work man turns himself
Into matter, as Christ does through the Eucharist.

Work is like a death. We have to pass
Through death. We have to be killed."

We have to wake in order to work, to labor
And count, to fail repeatedly, to submit

To the furious rhythm of machines, to suffer
The pandemonium and inhabit the repetitions,

To become the sacrificial beast: time entering
Into the body, the body entering into time.

She presses her forehead against the table:
To work in order to eat, to . . .

Outside, the moths are flaring into stars
And stars are strung like beads across the heavens,

Inside, a glass of red wine trembles
Next to the cold cabbage and broken bread.

Exhausted night, she is the brimming liquid
And untouched food. Come down to her.

I love the "Lectures on Verse," and I like the notion so much that I've written my own lectures on love; they are from a new book called *On Love*. The core of the book is a group of twenty-five poems, in which different speakers from the past step forward and give talks about love, beginning with Diderot and ending with Colette. It's a sort of symposium across the centuries. I've called on many figures from the past. I suppose I should dedicate this poem to Aleksander Wat because the first speaker is Tristan Tzara, and Polish Dadism is really a movement of the twenties. Milosz is a poet of the thirties. Tristan Tzara, *née* Sami Rosenwieck, is from Romania. This poem is a pantoum. [Reads "Tristan Tzara."]

Just one more poem: "Milena Jesenská," whom I first knew as the recipient of an extraordinary group of letters from Kafka. But when I went to

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Prague and read a biography of her and went to the house where she lived, I began to have a sense of her as a person and as a remarkable heroine. She was a terrifically brave Czech journalist who died in a concentration camp. So I wanted to write a poem in tribute to her, paying tribute to Kafka.

> Thank you for attending this tribute to love.
> I present myself to you as a Czech journalist
> and translator—and also as a modern woman
> who has recognized the cruelty of our century.
> Thus far it has been a calamitous century;
> I haven't lost my vital optimism as a woman
> or my curiosity as a practicing journalist,
> but tonight's lecture is an obituary for love
>
> because Franz Kafka—the writer—has died. [. . .]

Here's a strange and wonderful poem by Milosz called "And the City Stood in its Brightness." [Reads poem.] This is a poem that Adam and I both love, "Mittelbergheim." It was written in Alsace in 1951.

> Wine sleeps in casks of Rhine oak.
> I am wakened by the bell of a chapel in the vineyards
> Of Mittelbergheim. I hear a small spring
> Trickling into a well in the yard, a clatter
> Of sabots in the streets. Tobacco drying
> Under the eaves, and ploughs and wooden wheels
> And mountain slopes and autumn are with me.
>
> I keep my eyes closed. Do not rush me,
> You, fire, power, might, for it is too early.
> I have lived through many years and, as in this half-dream,
> I felt I was attaining the moving frontier
> Beyond which color and sound come true
> And the things of this earth are united.
> Do not yet force me to open my lips.
> Let me trust and believe I will attain.
> Let me linger here in Mittelbergheim.
>
> I know I should. They are with me,
> Autumn and wooden wheels and tobacco hung
> Under the eaves. Here and everywhere
> Is my homeland, wherever I turn

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And in whatever language I would hear
The song of a child, the conversation of lovers.
Happier than anyone, I am to receive
A glance, a smile, a star, silk creased
At the knee. Serene, beholding,
I am to walk on hills in the soft glow of day
Over waters, cities, roads, human customs.
Fire, power, might, you who hold me
In the palm of your hand whose furrows
Are like immense gorges combed
By southern wind. You who grant certainty
In the hour of fear, in the week of doubt,
It is too early, let the wine mature,
Let the travelers sleep in Mittelbergheim.

Adam Zagajewski: This poem is dedicated to you, Czeslaw, and I'm happy to read together with my friend who invited me to Houston ten years ago and saved me from starving in Paris. This is an amazing gathering with poets and friends from different stages of my life, and with Adam Michnik, to whom I dedicated the poem I will read. It's called "Lightning." It's from *Tremor*, my first collection in English.

We lived understanding little and craving
knowledge. As plants do, when they grow toward
light, we sought justice
and we found it only in the plants,
in the leaves of the horse chestnut, enormous
as oblivion, in the fern shrubs which swayed
slowly and made no promises.
In silence. In music. In a poem. We sought
justice, confusing it with beauty.
Emotion is governed by strict laws.
We turned our backs on cruelty
and boredom. There's no solution, that much
we knew, there are only fragments, and the fact that
we spoke in complete sentences seemed to us
a strange joke. How easy it was to hate
a policeman. Even his face seemed to us
a part of his uniform. The errors of others
were easy to detect. On a hot day, the river
reflected mountains, clouds. Life then was
round like a balloon when it gets going.
Spruces stood still, filled with shadows
and stillness like the depths of an ocean. Green

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eyes, your wet skin,
my lizard. In the evening, mute lightning
flickered in the sky. It was other people's thoughts
burning down safety. One had to
pack in a hurry and go farther,
east or west, mapping out
an escape route.

Now, another poem, "My Masters."

My masters are not infallible.
They're neither Goethe,
who had a sleepless night
only when distant volcanoes moaned, nor Horace,
who wrote in the language of gods
and altar boys. My masters
seek my advice. In fleecy
overcoats hurredly slipped on
over their dreams, at dawn, when
the cool wind interrogates the birds,
my masters talk in whispers.
I can hear their broken speech.

I wrote a new poem in Polish, which doesn't yet have a title. It is written in memory of Jozef Czapski, the Polish painter and writer, an unusual man. [Reads in Polish.] Another new poem, a kind of double elegy for Joseph Brodsky and Krzysztof Kieslowski, two men of genius and friends of mine who died in the same year. The poem is called "One Morning in Vicenza"—where we gathered for the second burial of Joseph. [Reads this poem and others, the last of which is "Self Portrait":]

Between the computer, a pencil, and a typewriter
half my day passes. One day it will be half a century.
I live in strange cities and sometimes talk
with strangers about matters strange to me.
I listen to music a lot: Bach, Mahler, Chopin, Shostakovich.
I see three elements in music: weakness, power, and pain.
The fourth has no name.
I read poets, living and dead, who teach me
tenacity, faith, and pride. I try to understand
the great philosophers—but usually catch just

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scraps of their precious thoughts.
I like to take long walks on Paris streets
and watch my fellow creatures, quickened by envy,
anger, desire; to trace a silver coin
passing from hand to hand as it slowly
loses its round shape (the emperor's profile is erased).
Beside me trees expressing nothing
but a green, indifferent perfection.
Black birds pace the fields,
waiting patiently like Spanish widows.
I'm no longer young, but someone else is always older.
I like deep sleep, when I cease to exist,
and fast bike rides on country roads when poplars and houses
dissolve like cumuli on sunny days.
Sometimes in museums the paintings speak to me
and irony suddenly vanishes.
I love gazing at my wife's face.
Every Sunday I call my father.
Every other week I meet with friends,
thus proving my fidelity.
My country freed itself from one evil. I wish
another liberation would follow.
Could I help in this? I don't know.
I'm truly not a child of the ocean,
as Antonio Machado wrote about himself,
but a child of air, mint, and cello
and not all the ways of the high world
cross paths with the life that—so far—
belongs to me.

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POETRY AND THE SACRED

Blanford Parker: Our first speaker will be **Jane Hirshfield**, the author of several books of poetry, most recently *The Lives of the Heart*. **Steve Kowit** is a poet whose work includes *Passionate Journey* and *Lurid Confessions*. **Al Zolynas** is the co-editor of *Men of Our Time: An Anthology of Male Poetry in Contemporary America*. **Jack Miles** won the Pulitzer Prize for non-fiction in 1996; and **Adam Zagajewski** is, of course, one of the most important Polish authors of our time.

Jane Hirshfield: I was asked to give a general context for looking at Czeslaw Milosz's poetry in its relationship to the sacred. Some of what I am leaving out: Catholic theology, the tragi-comic vision, Simone Weil, Thomas Merton, actual spiritual practice, the poet's deep sympathy with Buddhism. Some of what I am hoping to cover: exile, praise, time, and, slightly more difficult to name, the way the poet's relationship to the sacred watermarks his relations with others.

Exile, one might think, belongs to a different domain, yet in virtually every culture, the sense of exile is one perfume of the sacred, hovering always near. The connection is visible even in the earliest poem in world literature for which we know the author, the "Hymn to Inanna," written by the Sumerian Enheduanna in 2300 BCE. The daughter of a Mesopotamian king, Enheduanna was dragged from her temple during a time of war, then stripped of her clothes, probably raped, and carried deep into the desert to live among lepers. Under these untender circumstances she composed her hymn. Yet the bitterness of this early poem's occasion is also emblematic. Outwardly, separation is as fundamental to speech as is nearness: communication means some gap must exist, needing to be crossed. And inwardly, the sense of exile arrives concurrently with our earliest consciousness of the sacred. Oneness precedes all knowledge; existing serenely beyond the reach of word and thought, it is, in the Taoist phrasing, unborn. Consciousness and the knowable sacred are born only when that primordial oneness breaks apart.

Through exile, then—both curse and gift in traditions of the spirit worldwide—the knowing self comes into being. The doctrine appears in the Indian Vedas, in the Greek philosopher Empedocles, and in the Manichean tradition that appears so often in Milosz's poems as he ponders the image of the world as aboriginally divided, the workshop of a demiurge, and ponders, too, human life as a condition of estrangement. The paradox is this: with the arrival of twoness comes also the longing for union, and both intellectual pursuit and pursuit of the sacred come to hold the deep flavor of eros. Knowledge and its namings are literally acts of "wooing" in Homeric Greek, and an erotic murmuring into the ear of the beloved is a voice continually heard in Milosz's poems, as they list the substances of existence, the plants and foodstuffs and cosmetics. The acts of sacrifice,

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prayer, and offering also attempt to bridge apartness. See how prayer appears in Milosz's description, as a path toward connection:

> You ask me how to pray to someone who is not.
> All I know is that prayer constructs a velvet bridge
> And walking it we are aloft, as on a springboard,
> Above landscapes the color of ripe gold
> Transformed by a magic stopping of the sun.

I have been speaking metaphysically, but exile and estrangement are markers of the sacred in the ordinary ways as well. In the lives of Catholic saints, Buddhist masters, Hindu ecstatics, almost always some fracturing appears—a breakage in the course of ordinary life allows the extraordinary life, the extraordinary questions, entrance. Wallace Stevens described the imaginative act as a pressing back from within against the outward pressure of reality; one can say the same of spiritual life. Ease cannot temper us in the intimate encounter with the real, and those who see the ways of the gods—Tiresias, the imagined figure of Homer, Oedipus after he learns the truth of his life—are made blind by the fullness of what they see. Much more than simple faith, it is the weight of inexplicable suffering and loss and banishment that brings forth the great encounters in spiritual life.

Milosz's exile is not into blindness, but an exile of seeing and witness, with the knowledge of extinction sharpened by war, especially the Warsaw uprising, and the knowledge of suffering sharpened by the pressure of the history that followed. Against these experiences, the imagination pressed back: with the driving question of good and evil in human nature and in the world, and also with the question of Paradise, about which, it seems, the poet has never quite made up his mind—for many of the poems make of this particular, temporal earth a Paradise that is both preserved by memory and taken by transience. And so we come into the terrain of the second and third of my themes, praise and time, which intertwine deeply for Milosz.

Praise is one of the fundamental gestures of the soul before the sacred, familiar to us from the Biblical Psalms, from the Avatamsaka Sutra of Hua-Yen Buddhism, from Hildegard of Bingen, Rumi, and Kabir. Neither propitiation nor flattery, in the mature spirit praise is the one answer we can offer to the question of why we are here. Yet Milosz knows that what he praises is drawn from this earthly existence, and so he writes in "An Hour":

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Leaves glowing in the sun, zealous hum of bumblebees,
From afar, from somewhere beyond the river, echoes of lingering voices
And the unhurried sounds of a hammer gave joy not only to me.
Before the five senses were opened, and earlier than any beginning
They waited, ready, for all those who call themselves mortals,
so that they might praise, as I do, life, that is, happiness.

The joy that is given "not only to me"—is it given to other humans nearby, to angels, to God? It is hard to say. But because for Milosz a central dilemma is the contradiction between our glimpses into the eternal Real and our human subjection to transience, what can be said is what is signalled by the title, and by each image of the poem: whatever joy we achieve is ours for a moment only, perhaps an hour—but always the knowledge is clear: it will pass.

The statement appears again in the poem "On Angels:"

Short is your stay here:
now and then at a matinal hour, if the sky is clear,
in a melody repeated by a bird,
or in the smell of apples at the close of day
when the light makes the orchards magic. [. . .]

The theme clarifies: transience itself, for Milosz, requires praise of what passes. Praise is the temporal soul's only possible gesture—the way existence does honor before existence. And so Milosz describes the blacksmith shop of his childhood,a place of construction and of repair, of sensuous blazing, filled with sound and smell and the demands of accurate, muscular making. The living horses stamp nearby, and nearby, too, flows his beloved river; the poem closes by describing both the young boy Milosz once was and the older self, looking now back at that boy: "I stare and stare. It seems I was called for this: / To glorify things just because they are."

Memory's act of retrieval, preserving for all time what is lost for all time: the act mirrors the poet's conception of Christian redemption: *apokatastasis,* the reversal of time's unravelling into a restoration of all that has ever been. A recurring statement in *Provinces* serves as that collection's presiding spirit: "Once only, from the beginning till the end of the world." Under such knowledge, and in the light of the eternal, the poet chose his task—to recreate in his words all he has seen and known. It is the way he will attempt to answer the last theme on my list—the poet's obligation to the sacred in this life, and his reply to the heavenly injunction he hears at the end of the poem "On Angels": "day draws near / another one / do what you can."

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And so we come to the small, slight figure of the librarian Miss Jadwiga, lost in the chaos of Warsaw, who accompanies the poet's long life in her long death. She is irretrievably vanished, and yet, like the tin plate and half-peeled lemons of a Dutch painting, in her the Real once existed. Milosz gives to Miss Jadwiga, and to us, the only restoration he is able: the analogous, human, and insufficient Paradise of the poems. It is not enough; it is what he can do.

What is our obligation to the Sacred? In his Nobel lecture, Milosz describes an "insoluble contradiction" between the poetic impulse to write only of God-created being, *esse*, and the requirement to recognize his solidarity with the fate of his fellow men.

Yet to stand in solidarity with others is not an avoidance of the sacred, but one of its demands—or so Mahayana Buddhism teaches, with its ideal of the *bodhisattva*: the person who, though fully awakened, refuses to enter Nirvana, remaining in the world of suffering until every last being, every last blade of grass, is able to enter as well.

Whether any art, even an art that stands with others, can be a sufficient fulfillment of the soul's obligation is a finally unanswerable dilemma of Milosz's poems. The question is already fully present in "Dedication," written in Warsaw in 1945: "You whom I could not save / Listen," the poem begins, then goes on to ask its famous question: "What is poetry which does not save / Nations or people?" The poet offers his words to the dead, lays his book at the graveside "like millet or poppy seeds. . . .So that you should visit us no more." But over the many decades the dead continue to visit, to "stare out, silent, as if from behind a glass," and incomprehension before their fate is a note the poet returns to again and again. He strives in his words to effect what he knows words cannot do—reach past the glass, into the realm of the ones who are silent. The obligation of the living to the dead goes unresolved.

But when Milosz does come to his moments of peace—of grace, or of respite—it is in two ways. One is in the transcendent, physical gift-moment in which time dissolves. The other is in accepting his human solidarity with both the dead and the living, his full kinship with others. That kinship appears in the late, sweetened compassion of poems such as "My-ness" or "On a Beach" or "Blacksmith Shop," in which he can say: ". . .And I delight in being here on earth / For one more moment, with them, here on earth, / To celebrate our tiny, tiny my-ness." In which he can say: "A sensation of my neighbor's misfortune pierces me and I begin / to comprehend // In this dark age the bond of our common fate and a compassion / more real than I was inclined to confess." In which he can say: "It seems I was called for this: / To glorify things just because they are."

Steve Kowit: I have much to say about Milosz and little about the sacred—the realm about which we cannot speak and with which all poets grapple. Poetry

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that is more than entertainment is always an attempt to dance around, and point to, the sacred. Milosz's poems are filled with astonishment at the glory of existence, despite the nightmare of the twentieth century, of human nature, of the natural system, of the order of the world—that built-in engineering flaw that demands that we kill and be slaughtered. "This World," from *Facing the River*, reiterates the fundamental Christian longing for things to be other than they seem: the heartfelt if perhaps naive insistence that this world of suffering and loss surely cannot be all that God intended. I read this poem as a putatively innocent but touchingly ironic restatement of Revelations 21, which promises that "there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. . . .Behold, I shall make all things new." Milosz restates that lovely dream like this: "It appears that it was all a misunderstanding. / What was only a trial run was taken seriously. / [. . .] What a relief! Breathe freely, you who suffered much."

The heart of the poem is in that poignant last line. Isn't that what we all long for, and wish to believe; isn't that our fantastic dream? The dream of renewal, of a new beginning; the hope that this world is different from what one supposed—and luckier. In *A Year of the Hunter*, Milosz quotes Karol Ludwik Komiński, a contemporary whose brand of Catholicism is similar to his own: "The meaning of my faith in God is that I should have hope that the noble and just yearning of the human heart will be fulfilled."

But Milosz knows that this world, filled with suffering and injustice as it is, is nonetheless a magnificent, incomprehensible gift. His poem "Gift" records that realization, a moment not of the soul's longing but of the heart's fulfillment. It's the record of an "ordinary" moment, one that's no less extraordinary for that: a moment when the heart-center has opened and the poet finds himself fully in the presence of the world, in reverential gratitude, "bowing"—as Bill Merwin once so marvelously put it—"not knowing to what." [Reads poem.]

Let me close with a line from *The Separate Notebooks*, a statement that both encompasses aspects of human reality and summarizes Milosz's reverential but unsentimental sense of the sacred: "In the hall of pain, what abundance on the table." Thank you.

Al Zolynas: I will talk on what I call "Three Faces of the Sacred in the Poetry of Czeslaw Milosz" by commenting on "Blacksmith's Shop," on "Secretaries," and on "A Meadow." But I first want to refer to Milosz's quotation at the end of the introductory essay to his anthology, *A Book of Luminous Things*. In that essay, he says he is interested in "the visible world again and again unveiling itself and opening itself to the eye." There's an interesting paradox in the notion that the visible has to be unveiled. What is the problem if we can see it? And yet what we think we see is not always

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what's there. It's in moments of what the wisdom traditions and perennial philosophy have referred to as "true seeing" or "real seeing" that you get these glimpses and "unveilings" of Milosz. The poet has had these glimpses, and he is compelled to share them. I think this is at the heart of what great poetry tries to grapple with. I would define the sacred by turning Milosz's work in a different direction than it's been turned so far—as the experience of the eternal, the transcendent, the unveiled reality, the moments when things fall away. We seem to see more clearly. Things are bathed in luminosity, one of his favorite words. Space opens up. We hear more clearly. We have the sense of connectedness with something larger than our ordinary life, and yet paradoxically it is our ordinary life that itself is "the large thing."

So the first of the three faces of the sacred I call, "The Face of Glorious Being," and "Blacksmith Shop" refers to an experience Milosz had as a child growing up in Lithuania.

> I liked the bellows operated by rope.
> A hand or foot pedal—I don't remember which.
> But that blowing, and the blazing of the fire!
> . . . . . .
>
> [. . .] I stare and stare. It seems I was called for this:
> To glorify things just because they are.

There's so much of the elemental in that poem: fire, water, earth, air—all the things that we live in and that constitute our physical life. How marvelous to be arrested for that moment as a child and to get one's vocation from that experience, one's calling to glorify being itself. I don't think we—as humans, as artists—can glorify unless we use words, or some other form of imagery. The things themselves don't need to be glorified, but we need to do the glorifying.

The next poem, a very interesting and cryptic one, in a way, exemplifies "The Face of Mysterious Creation," "Secretaries": "I am no more than a secretary of the invisible thing / That is dictated to me and a few others. [. . .]" People have asked over the years where a poem comes from, where images and language come from. Milosz says at the end, "It is not up to us to inquire, we won't read it anyway." His equating a secretary with a poet suddenly strips the poet of his or her ego. This leaves nothing to boast about, to feel grandiose about. A poet may be just someone taking notes.

In a recent poem, "A Meadow," composed after Milosz's return to Lithuania, he seeks a meadow, first in his memory and then in actuality. Milosz

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shows us his third sacred face, "The Face of Joyful Disappearance." [Reads poem.] The poem contains wisdom beyond words and yet relies on words to express itself and its ineffable, pure joy. Suddenly Milosz finds himself in the place of his early childhood and, influenced by the nature around him—the grass, the breeze, the sunshine—feels himself lifting out of himself, weeping as his expression of that joy. The ego has disappeared, at least momentarily. There's a sense of return to that place of childhood and a redemption from exile, even if only momentarily—a deep sense of cosmic homecoming.

Blanford Parker: Lithuanians and Poles, poets, and other human beings have claimed feelings of kinship and admiration for Milosz. I feel a moral and spiritual obligation to say something on behalf of Roman Catholics and their relations to Milosz. Milosz belongs to Roman Catholicism, but his role is different from that of John Paul II. Both are of mammoth significance in modern culture, but Milosz is sometimes a Roman heretic. I will read one small but very great poem, "In a Jar." It's indescribable how powerful this poem was to me when I first read it.

> Now, with all my knowledge, honorable newts,
> I approach the jar in which you live
> And see how you float up vertically to the surface
> Showing your bellies of vermilion color,
> Color of flame, that makes you akin
> To the alchemists' salamander living in fire. [. . .]

This is a poem about the dualism of Christianity. Bonaventure's words apocryphally or truly were, "Help me to walk in fire." What he meant by that was, God help us—not in Hell but in purgatorial fire—to attain the perfection requisite for eternity. It's a metaphor, a recognition as well as a doctrine of Catholicism, of the imperfection of every man walking in fire. It's Christian, dualist, reaching out for the transformation of the mortal into the immortal; it's of the hierarchy of animal existence, human intellect, and the divine overseer.

Jack Miles: I'm going to speak about Milosz's prose rather than his poetry, about the Catholic Milosz and about Catholics and Poles and Polish Americans. First, however, I want to thank Czeslaw Milosz for agreeing to this conference.

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On a Saturday afternoon in about 1956, three years after the publication of *The Captive Mind* and more than a decade before I myself would read that book, I went to confession in Our Lady Help of Christians Church, a mixed Irish, Italian, and Polish parish on the west side of Chicago. "Bless me, father, for I have sinned," I said. "It has been two days since my last confession. I have committed the sin of self-abuse three times." It is the belief of the Catholic church, repeatedly confirmed in recent years by His Holiness John Paul II, that any deliberate sexual activity outside marriage merits eternal torment. Die with such a sin on your soul and you will rot in hell forever.

On this particular Saturday afternoon, the clerical voice from the other side of the confessional grate happened to have a heavy Polish accent. I had somehow found my way into the confessional of the man we called "the d.p. priest."

The letters *d.p.* stood for displaced person, but many in our neighborhood, where there were a great many d.p.'s, no longer knew or had never learned what the initials stood for. *D.p.* was simply a demographic category, standing for a body of pale, generally unsmiling people in ill-matched clothing with unpronounceable names and excruciating accents—people who didn't know how to talk, didn't know how to dress, didn't know how to act, didn't know anything but Polish or Lithuanian.

What the d.p. priest asked me on that afternoon in 1956 was, "How old are you?"

"Fourteen, father," I said. An unsettlingly long pause followed, and then the d.p. priest said, "I think, for a boy of your age, this is not a serious sin. Do you have some other sins to confess?"

"No, father."

"Very good. Now I give you my blessing. Say one Our Father and one Hail Mary for world peace."

The d.p. priest—or so I later came to think—was what we would now call an émigré intellectual, a dissident priest, a reformer. At the time, however, I took him to be what kids in the neighborhood said *d.p.* really stood for: dumb Polack. He didn't even know that masturbation was a mortal sin! There was no doubt in my mind that I still had this sin on my soul, so I went into another confessional. There were six in my church, and on Saturdays there was a priest in every one. This time I drew an Irish-American priest, Fr. Donahue, who exhorted me to purity in the language I had become accustomed to hear once a week. He assigned me a rather longer penance of prayers to recite and absolved me routinely: "*de omnibus peccatis tuis in nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti. Amen.*" I went into the afternoon cool feeling cleansed, renewed, innocent, my mind at peace—but captive.

My approach to the implications of Czeslaw Milosz's work for religion and politics is by way of four vignettes. I've given you the first. The second is

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the memory of a recording I heard as a Jesuit novice. One day during my two-year Jesuit novitiate, the novice master, Fr. Murphy, chose to play for us the recording of a long lecture by Robert J. Lifton, MD, the psychologist who treated American soldiers who had been captured and subjected to brainwashing by the Chinese Communists. "Brainwashing," now a familiar word in English, is a direct translation of the Chinese *xi nao*, "wash brain." Brainwashing showed godless communism at its most godless and this presumably was why Fr. Murphy chose to play the Lifton tapes for us. What he failed to notice, however, was how astonishingly some of the techniques of Chinese Communist brainwashing resembled those of a Jesuit novitiate. Jesuit novices were free to walk out whenever we wanted to and were never subjected to physical torture or true verbal abuse. Nonetheless, there were close Chinese Communist analogues to a number of practices.

I was not shocked to notice that the Chinese Communists had, as it seemed to me at the time, borrowed so much from us. What they had borrowed was psychologically valid. The tragedy was only that they had used them in a malign cause. And yet, the isomorphism stayed with me. A washed brain is a washed brain even if you have helped wash it yourself.

My third vignette takes place in 1965. President Kennedy had been assassinated. President Johnson had begun a colossal escalation of the Vietnam War. I had taken my Jesuit vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and for the past year had been living in Rome studying philosophy and residing at Il Palazzo del Gesú, a historic Jesuit institution where one may view, among other objects of interest, the death masks of every Jesuit general back to St. Ignatius. Each morning, in my cassock, I would walk across Piazza Venezia on my way to class at the Pontifical Gregorian University, and now there were anti-American placards pasted to some of the walls along the way. "*Giú le mani da Vietnam*!" one of them read: "Hands off Vietnam!" *Time* magazine, at this point, three years before the Tet offensive, was still stoutly defending the war, treating it as a kind of reenactment of the Korean War. But clearly Europe was turning against it. The recreation room in Palazzo del Gesú was littered with newspapers and magazines in several European languages, but on this they all seemed to agree.

One day a haughty Milanese priest—said to be a poet, said to know Fellini, and said to have had women—threw down his newspaper in the recreation room and snarled: "*Anche tu difendi questi massacri*!" "You too defend these massacres." He had never spoken to me before and would never speak to me again. He belonged to a class of Jesuits who never spoke to Americans.

Three years later, in 1969, now only a year away from leaving the Jesuits, I was back in the United States, sent by the order to study the Hebrew Bible at Harvard University. In the spring of that year, a group led by radical Harvard students occupied the dean's office; the university called in the police, who sur-

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rounded the building and eventually expelled the occupying students with considerable force. In the aftermath, a combination of student strikes and simple turmoil brought the life of the university to a halt. Many students wore ribbons that said, "Shut It Down." I wore, for one day, a ribbon that said "Keep Harvard Open," but then I threw it away. The question I was struggling to formulate, the question behind the question of "Which side are you on?" was "How many sides are there?" I wanted there to be more than two.

Because of my European experience, I already had been exposed to all the arguments against American involvement in Vietnam but I couldn't forget the d.p.'s in Our Lady Help of Christians parish. They weren't fleeing nothing. In the furor over Vietnam, no one seemed any longer to be thinking about Eastern Europe. I said to anyone who would listen that we should withdraw from Vietnam because the war there was weakening us for the struggle against worldwide communism, but no one would listen; as for my membership in the Jesuits or in the Church, as for the Bible that I was studying so intensely, they all seemed to have no connection whatsoever to any of these events.

And then in the agitation of this moment I came upon two calming and clarifying works of art. One was Bernardo Bertolucci's film *Before the Revolution*. The other was Czeslaw Milosz's *The Captive Mind*. I read *The Captive Mind* at a gulp and understood its characterizations of the varieties of *sacrificium intellectus* with embarrassing ease. What helped more, however, was Milosz's determination to understand what had attracted him and so many of his generation to communism. Only by understanding that could he determine what his future commitments would have to be. As the moment neared when I would leave the Jesuits, I was in an analogous situation. I needed to understand what had attracted me to the order so that I could determine what my future commitments should be. But this was only the beginning of the complication, for I was retreating from that to which Milosz in *The Captive Mind* had seemed to be advancing. Whatever the formal similarities, was I a political as well as a religious deserter? It mattered to me that Milosz was Polish and, I inferred, Catholic or a Catholic fellow-traveller. One develops a kind of instinct about these things, and speaking with more perspicacity than I had at the time, he was in a position to do for ethnic Catholics (as we call them in America) and even for political conservatives what *Partisan Review* had long been doing for Jews, "Yankees," and political liberals. For them, *Partisan Review* opened a space in which one could be anti-communist but radical. Before Milosz, no one had very effectively opened a space in which one could be anti-fascist but pious, patriotic, and culturally conservative.

Milosz helped me take conscious possession of something I had brought home from Europe almost without realizing it, along with the memory of those brushes with *Marxisant* Jesuits. That something was a background awareness of a feature of post-war European politics that

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would seem too big for America to miss, but that by and large we have missed, and I include in this indictment not just politicians and journalists but also poets and novelists. I refer to the key role played even now, but especially just after the war, by Catholic parties like the *Christliche Demokratische Union* in Germany, the *Democristiani* in Italy, and the *Gaullistes* in France. Catholics led the way as well, if somewhat later, in the recovery from fascism in Spain, and of course from communism in Poland. And yet, for every thousand Americans who have heard of Jean-Paul Sartre or Simone de Beauvoir, there is barely one who has any sense of the intellectual roots of Europe's Catholic parties in the nineteenth century, barely one who appreciates the role in the creation of the new Europe of Catholics like Robert Schuman, Jean Monnet, Paul Henri Spaak, and Alcide de Gasperi. Even more exiguous is any American sense of the common intellectual tradition, democratic but not Anglo-American, binding together such different personalities as Konrad Adenauer and Charles de Gaulle.

In the United States, intellectual leadership has been Protestant and Jewish far more often than Catholic. Although Catholics as a demographic group cannot complain of discrimination, writers from an American Catholic background have suffered, I believe, from the absence in this country of any convincingly democratic political alternative with significantly Catholic intellectual roots, anything corresponding to these European movements and leaders. Thus, they have tended to acquiesce in the tacit American reading of Catholicism as the passive bulwark of government, as latent fascism, or as McCarthyism in remission. And at least a few Catholic writers or prospective writers fighting the falsification of self that the writer's life seems to entail in this country, have tied themselves in secret knots and written less freely than they might have.

I did not read anything by Milosz for years after reading *The Captive Mind*. I started reading his poetry only when he won the Nobel Prize. At first, the verses did not seem to link together into as complete and seamless a whole as the prose of *The Captive Mind*, and I wanted that seamlessness. Little by little, however, I have come to value a poetry that, as I might put it, does not have everything sewed up. My own prose, I fear, approaches the ideal of chain mail, never a link unforged and no part of the subject unprotected. In his poetry, Milosz arrives armed rather as an Athenian warrior of the sort that you might see portrayed on a classic vase. There is the plumed helmet, the embossed shield, the sword held high and a cloak—but plainly visible beneath them is the naked man.

Adam Zagajewski: In scientific conferences there are two categories of presentations: the long papers and short reports. Mine will be a short report

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about Milosz's creativity. Only a Polish reader can say a few words about Milosz the translator, and specifically Milosz the Bible translator.

Last night, I debated with Adam Michnik about what was worse in Milosz's life, the fierce attack by his political adversaries or his solitude. He thought it was the misery due to the many vicious attacks from the fifties on, but I maintained that the most unpleasant thing in Milosz's life was his solitude in the sixties and the seventies. Out of this solitude there arose his magnificent works. His weapon against solitude was not whining but working. In the seventies, he began to translate the Bible. To do so, he learned Greek and Hebrew. He found the best diction to purify the language, to save it from the banality of journalism, and from the language f pedants. He started with the Book of Psalms and went on to the Book of Job, the Book of Five Megillahs, which comprised, among others, Ecclesiastes and the Jeremiads and so on, to the Book of Psalms, the Gospel of Mark, and St. John's Apocalypse. In this way, he inscribed himself in the long series of Polish writers and poets who, starting from the fifteenth century, had produced a series of translations of the Bible, and Milosz's Polish translations are magnificent. They have the tone of his poetry, plus something else. It is his poetry vibrant with the echo of Biblical language. Thank you.

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THE TEACHER AND HIS STUDENTS

Robert Faggen: Czeslaw Milosz, in addition to being a poet, an essayist, a novelist, and translator, has been a professor at the University of California for over two decades. As three of his former students will tell us, that was interesting. **Bogdana Carpenter** is Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor; **Mimi McKay** went on to study at the Jagiellonian University and became a journalist; and **Richard Lourie** is a novelist and biographer and one of Milosz's translators.

Bogdana Carpenter: "Like Proteus, I appear to people in different incarnations," said Milosz of himself. In his guise as professor, he often expressed amazement: "I don't understand how I, without a Ph.D., have become a professor," but he admitted that he did not dislike the image of the poet-scholar. "Being a professor is an ideal solution. You don't have to write for the market. You can write what you want." The three of us at this table will share with you our memories of Milosz the teacher. We come from different backgrounds, followed different careers, represent different generations, and each of us took something different from the classes in Dwinelle Hall in Berkeley. When I started my graduate studies in 1967, Milosz had been teaching in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures for seven years. For me he was a legendary figure, someone whose name one whispered, a revered poet, but a poet whose poems I could not read in Poland. I read them for the first time in 1963 when I came to Paris. I went to Milosz's lectures not so much out of interest in Polish literature, at least at first, but to hear the great poet. I remember my first class when I couldn't find the room in Dwinelle Hall and then saw somebody walking ahead of me. At a certain moment the man, hearing my steps, turned around, and I saw incredible eyebrows. That's all. I knew I was on the right track.

After the first few lectures I was no longer sure whether I was in the classroom for the poet or for the professor. The lectures opened a whole new world. They were not only (as the official descriptions claimed) about Polish literature, but also about history, religion, philosophy, Freemasonry, the Kabbalah, eighteenth-century mysticism, Swedenborg—things I had never heard about. The digressions often surpassed, both in terms of time and interest, the subject itself. They also were a dialogue, even if most of the time the only voice was that of the professor—who always watched our faces, eager for our reactions. In fact it was a double dialogue: Milosz conversed not only with his students, but with the writers about whom he lectured. For him, writers were living people with whom he held a discourse, sometimes from a distance of several centuries. He communicated a sense of closeness and involvement that I rarely found either in Poland or in this country. His approach to literature was infectious.

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As a young person from Communist Poland who was plunged into the heady atmosphere of the Berkeley campus in the mid-sixties with its free speech movement and Vietnam War marches, the ground under my feet was wobbly. For a student of literature the sense of confusion was even greater, since these were the years of triumphant structuralism followed by no less triumphant deconstructionism. If I finally managed to regain a sense of firm ground, I owe it to these classes in Dwinelle Hall, where discussions of what we read and what we were experiencing around us were always guided by a strong belief in values, a sense of hierarchy. Speaking tongue-in-cheek, Milosz explained his need for hierarchy as illustrative of his elitism and fastidiousness, but he taught his students the importance of values as a defense against chaos and relativism.

My indebtedness to Milosz goes beyond the classroom experience. It includes his many writings on Polish literature—from nineteenth-century writers like Juliusz Slowacki, Zygmunt Krasiński, Sienkiewicz, and Rodziewiczówna to twentieth-century writers like Józef Czechowicz, Ştanislaw Vincenz, Gombrowicz, Aleksander Wat, and Anna Świrszczyńska. The magnum opus of Milosz's scholarship is his *History of Polish Literature*. It has shaped my own approach to Polish literature and teaching. In this work the scholar, the critic, and the teacher meet. Written as a textbook, it also bears the stamp of the writer. Its narrative is lively and dramatic, and it would be hard to find another history of literature that reads so well. Milosz has the gift for vivid detail and good anecdotes. Among my favorites is one about Feliks Dzierzyński, the founder of the Soviet Cheka (the predecessor of the KGB), known as Bloody Feliks, who recited by heart the mystical poem "King Spirit" by the Polish Romantic poet Juliusz Slowacki; or about the trip by eighteenth-century writer Jan Potocki in a balloon, with his Turkish valet Osman. Milosz once said that the greatest enemy of man is generalization. Time and again, he presents phenomena in the most concrete and palpable way; thus the widespread and extraordinary but short-lived success of the Reformation of Poland is presented through the lifespan of a man, and I quote: "If we were to imagine a man born in 1500, he would have been seventeen at the moment when Martin Luther came out with his famous theses. Between his forty-ninth and sixty-fourth year, he would have seen a virtual triumph of Calvinism. But if our man reached the age of seventy or eighty he would have noticed signs of the imminent breakdown of Protestantism."

Milosz infuses his narrative, as he did his lectures, with humor and refreshing irreverence, delighting in the frivolous poems of the fifteeenth-century bishop and calling Mikolaj Rej, the father of Polish literature, "a glutton, a drunkard, a lecher, a gossiper, a man of obscene language, and a blasphemer." In revealing that one Polish Romantic bard had a mother

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complex while another trembled before the authority of his father, Milosz presented authors not as paper figures but as as real men with foibles, dark sides, and obsessions, as well as with talent and greatness. Milosz is able to capture the essence of a phenomenon with a few strokes of the pen. When he compared the image of the Teutonic Knights in the Polish national consciousness with that of the Nazis, he captured the archetypal nature of this image in a single sentence. The masterful portraits of the four writers in *The Captive Mind* are another good example. So is the *History:* Tadeusz Różewicz is "a poet of chaos with nostalgia for order"; Jozef Czechowicz's "lyrics can be likened to chamber music made poignant by the counterpoint of dark and metaphysical problems." Milosz's single-sentence formulas often say more than lengthy monographs.

He once indicated that the decision to write the *History* meant overcoming a host of methodological problems. Since the book was written for a foreign audience, it required a different approach than that of a historian of literature writing in Poland. The lack of familiarity of American students with Polish history and literature meant that he had to include much background information, and the paucity of translations from Polish into English made it necessary to include a larger-than-usual number of quotations, combining the factual literary history with an anthology. Also, it had to overcome a cultural barrier, since many Polish attitudes are difficult to understand from an American perspective. There are numerous references to figures and phenomena familiar to an educated English speaker: the murder of Bishop Stanislaw in twelfth-century Poland is compared to that of Thomas à Becket in England. Polish kings with their limited political power are compared to American presidents. Also, Milosz carefully brings out the ties in the presence of various Polish writers in either England or America, such as the English translations of a sixteenth-century Polish political writer, Wawrzyniec Goslicki, or Mickiewicz's and Sienkiewicz's ties to America. The discussion of Mickiewicz's poem "Potato" is to a great extent motivated by the fact that its action takes place in America. The desire to bring Polish literature closer to American students has, however, other interesting results because it opens up new perspectives on Polish literature itself. The effect can be unexpected, as, for instance, when Mickiewicz's *Konrad Wallenrod*, considered to be the first Polish national poem, is seen through American eyes and put side by side with the romantic stories about Indians. By de-Polonizing and objectivizing Polish literature, Milosz not only brings it closer to an American reader, but breaks the magic circle of national and literary taboos.

With few exceptions, Milosz's literary essays are on contemporary subjects. They are sharp in tone, argumentative, polemical as well as personal. Their goal is clarification, often by way of polemics, of Milosz's own vision

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of what poetry should be. He is trying to carve out of Polish literature a tradition that he can claim as his own: "That which withstands a confrontation with human, and not only Polish, greatness, that which defines my own individual and distinct self." The role of a literary historian of course is different. Therefore we ask, what is the relationship between Milosz the scholar and Milosz the poet? To what extent is Milosz a poet and someone with a clear *parti-pris* present in the *History*? How well did he manage to eliminate or control personal preferences and aversions? How successful is he in adopting a detached attitude "from the heights of academic knowledge"? He performs an admirable balancing act. Even the writers he dislikes, like Sienkiewicz or Dlugosz, are treated fairly and with restraint. Thus, the image of Polish literature that emerges is different from the conventional one found in Polish textbooks. It is more universal, more European, less provincial, particular, and self-referential. Milosz devotes, for instance, a considerable space to the Polish Reformation, something which in most Polish literary histories is dealt with in a cursory manner. The discussion of the Reformation is accompanied by a discussion of Jews and Jewish religious movements, and by frequent references to Lithuanian, Bielorussian, and Ukrainian elements of Polish culture. Similarly unorthodox is the picture of Romanticism, the bastion of Polish nationalism and messianism. Milosz's critical distance made him de-emphasize national issues and search for the traits that represent universal values. Consequently, his picture of Polish literature is complex and attractive. He once described this book as a tale: "Under the disguise of a textbook I tried to write a tale of a pathetic, tragic, grotesque, and fantastic adventure of Latinized Slavs that abounds in the so-called universal human values." Milosz's tale is not only dramatic and attractive, but very convincing. I want to thank you, Czeslaw Milosz.

Mimi McKay: On the day it was announced he'd won the Nobel Prize, October 9, 1980, I waited with the other students in the classroom where Milosz was holding his course on Dostoyevsky. There were a dozen of us that semester. We waited, wondering if our professor would show up. Slightly late, Milosz came to class pursued by reporters. He slammed the door on them with a curt goodbye and a smile, and noted that for Dostoevsky the minimum necessary for existence was two, and that, for Sartre, man is what he is not. Then he said that the Nobel belonged to the past and that all his life he'd been escaping from the past, always writing because he is dissatisfied with what he'd written. Now he hoped to do something better. He continued lecturing on Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground* about how the underground man believes in nothing, just feels pain and the need to scream, how with that constant interference from other voices we can delude ourselves forever. Domination or humiliation

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are the only possibilities in Dostoyevsky's work—no real contact between individuals. They can only speak using God as a telephone exchange, not directly. Distance between the two individuals is too great in Dostoyevsky: God must give you the number. He spoke of the philosopher Lev Shestov, and the world of blind determinism. For him, peace of mind was suspect, since the earth we live on does not predispose us to it. To bow or rebel? And in the name of what? Is there any valid reason to oppose necessity? God is omnipotent and free to do anything. Finally, he lectured on Simone Weil, for whom the main enemy of religion is worshipping the false god, society. The devil is social, and Milosz noted that the Nobel was unfortunately an example of a very social aspect of art.

My presence here today has a dual purpose: to represent the students, and to chronicle Milosz the professor, through five undergraduate courses he taught between 1979 and the spring of 1981—Contemporary Polish Poetry and Fiction, The Polish Theater, Dostoyevsky, and Polish Intellectual Trends Pre- and Post-1848. I took what might be the most complete, most obsessive-compulsive set of notes you're ever likely to come across. Fortunately they are full of direct quotes, though unfortunately filtered through the mind of a perhaps typical Berkeley undergrad, circa 1979.

Milosz commented in a lecture on Gombrowicz that he was surprised, given the difference in form, that he and his students could communicate. What shape must the lecture take in the minds of those who hear it? Joan Didion portrays herself as a child of California; but as a fifth-generation Californian with a past and a history, she is an anomaly. The true child of California is first generation, not fifth. Milosz has referred to America as "a country of exiles." California is clearly a state of exiles within that country. My parents left what history they had in other parts of this country in the 1950s and never looked back. I found out my mother spoke Spanish as her first language when I was twenty-five, because I happened to see a local newscast in which she was translating for some visiting Guatemalan nuns. I discovered my paternal grandmother was born in Poland when I was thirty, long after I'd made several trips to that country. In my home, first in Los Angeles and later in Bakersfield, there were few books and poetry came on greeting cards. There were lots of religious icons, both plastic and juvenile. Mass was held in the gym of the local high school. History came from textbooks and television. In fact, the teachers at my high school relied heavily on docudramas to supplement their teachings. And to this day, Disneyland serves as my only childhood point of reference for all types of historical buildings, from castles to town halls.

By the time I transferred from the Claremont Colleges to Berkeley I knew that something crucial was missing from my educational experience. It was then that I read *The Captive Mind* at the urging of my close friend Fred Jacobs, who'd studied it in Hannah Arendt's course at Berkeley in the

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1950s. As a student of political science I found Milosz's description of totalitaniarism and the rationalizations individuals used to survive within such a system fascinating, but beyond that there was an authenticity in the work that struck me in such a way that I sought and was granted a mid-year admission to Berkeley. That quarter, spring 1979, Milosz was teaching a seminar on the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. I went to the first meeting and fled, never to return. I spent that summer in Washington, D.C., working for the government, and every evening at the Library of Congress I read about *The Brothers Karamazov*. Now I was ready. He never taught that course again; a course on Dostoyevsky, yes, but not *The Brothers Karamazov*.

In the fall of 1979, I enrolled in Milosz's Contemporary Polish Poetry and Fiction. The course had no more than ten students, and I began to take copious notes as if my life depended on it; I wrote down every word. Clearly, I'm unable to do justice to Milosz's thoughts as expressed through his lectures. The best I can do is express what it was like to be a student in these courses and comment briefly on three recurrent themes that ran through each of them: history; the role of the artist in relation to history and society (in Adam Zagajewski's term, "solidarity solitude"); and the philosophical constructs of Pure Form in the case of Witkiewicz, in the case of Gombrowicz, and in the work of Dostoyevsky according to Milosz.

A few general notes on the classroom scene. We met in dirty rooms, with paper towels littered on the tables that he would often scribble on during lectures. As classroom administrator, Milosz called roll only once, in the last course I took, and halfway through the semester. The course grade was based on a final essay examination, either take-home or in-class. This caused a great deal of nervousness among some of the more grade-conscious students. Toward the end of the course on Dostoyevsky, a couple of students from the seminar approached me with their concerns about what the final exam would cover. After all, how were they to prepare, given the nature of the lectures? All I could do was repeat what Milosz had said: "My ambition is to teach you something." And that he expected the final exam to be "well-written." I recalled, but didn't tell them, that he had said, while looking at me when I was starting my third seminar, "I'm not very severe in grading; you know that."

Milosz's lectures were in what I imagine to be the style of a European master professor of the old school, yet turning that same act directly on its head. For example, in the course of a brilliant lecture on Dostoyevsky's *The Double*, and how the voices of others can become so intense that they become their own being, he commented, "You push a button, and like a box I can start talking." And on oppressive power in the form of Gombrowicz, the constant pressure created between people: "The professor should appear behind a beard and moustache, giving a serious mask." His comments were

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alternately opinionated and straightforward, or elusive; during a lecture on history and Dostoyevsky, he commented, "Truly intelligent people are reactionary, not progressive." But in a lecture on Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz's dark vision of art, in view of the demise of religion and philosophy, Milosz stated, "This is not my philosophy—necessarily."

Each course began with a lesson in history. In Contemporary Polish Poetry and Fiction, he said: "This course will deal with much history, where Americans show a great lack of understanding." My note in the margin shows how accurate he was; I wrote, "Get a good map of Europe." He then spoke of the constant struggle between spiritual and temporal powers, from Saint Stanislaw, the Bishop of Krakow in the eleventh century, to the Church versus the Communists in Poland in the twentieth, and observed that "history tends to be telescoped into one short paragraph; what of other factors?" Each course became a discourse on those "other factors," with Poland's "strange maverick history and mistrustful central authority" as a backdrop. He alternated between straightforward history and traditional and comments like, "Walt Whitman was responsible for World War I, since it was one of his followers who shot Ferdinand."

For Milosz, the role of the writer is inseparable from the larger historical context. Noting the political orientation of Polish literature and how it determines the role of the writer, he spoke of how Gombrowicz represented the rebellion of the individual, particularly in light of the undeveloped collective nature of Polish society. As to Dostoyevsky, he did not agree at all that what is needed to change the individual is to change society, as this would reduce man to a series of causes and events, bringing about ultimately the death of man. Dostoyevsky's work depicted what was going on the minds of the intelligentsia. Milosz described him as a realist, not a psychologist; he placed *Crime and Punishment*, for example, to the year and month, through references to particular situations, and described the common Western approach through psychological insights as "possible, but mostly wrong." He believed that Dostoyevsky introduced the novel as an instrument of both history and philosophy.

Milosz described the theme of Pure Form in Witkiewicz, where aesthetic values alone count. The recipe for a Pure Form play: "Nothing is so bad it can't be made worse." Here art exists for its own sake and is free from reality, representing nothing but itself and/or the metaphysical strangeness of existence. As Milosz put it, "Why here not there? Why now not then? And me, sitting here playing professor." And he warned: "Don't write about Pure Form unless you understand it." In Gombrowicz, form was the all-embracing problem of art and life. Thus men, and especially women, were different now than five hundred years ago, while the cat today is the cat as he was then. Milosz notes that Gombrowicz wrote with

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the selfish purpose of escaping his own form and of course betrayed himself because this dragged him in other directions. Any rebellion against form creates a new form, and that quickly changes into its opposite. As quoted by Milosz, Gombrowicz said: "I think; therefore I am not." And "Milosz, in not wanting to be Milosz, became more Milosz."

Here are some of the aphorisms that he shared with us in class. First, several from Stanislaw Jerzy Lec: "The window to the world can be covered with a newspaper." "What do you do when you find your wife's lover in bed with another woman?" "Are naked women intelligent?" "I had a dream about reality; such a relief to wake up." And now from Milosz, on literature and writing: "Writing about your own life, when you attempt to be sincere, you lie; artificiality allows a type of truth; besides, sincerity is a bore." "Literature about literature is the most ghastly." "Anyone engaged in a world of culture must pretend, since you couldn't possibly have read all of that." "Literature is suspect: honest people don't write." "All the literature of Europe comes from a combination of the sublime, and the grotesque." "Literature can have extraordinary power in a country where the past is transformed every few years." "Poetry is betrayed by words. True poetry is without words. A true poet should be unaware, and shouldn't write." "To create art, you must not be completely human; the observation thus necessary is an inhuman quality. Good people act on the misfortune of others rather than observe from a distance and think of themselves." "I write what I like, and not for their consumption." "The highest praise a poet can receive is to have his works become completely anonymous, while people sing and quote them everywhere." And finally, "I can be very intelligent, or stupid, depending on the audience." Someone in those classes must have been brilliant.

Richard Lourie: Before coming here, I checked on what Czeslaw had said about me in *The ABC Book*. He recalled from our first meeting in Berkeley in 1960 that I was "slovenly and dishevelled." I fully agree! To some degree this was programmatic and ideological. But when I read those two words, I pondered about the person I was then and the person I have become. After he had given me a bad mark he called me in for a conversation. During class, he had read my bluebook aloud without identifying its author, and said, "This essay is reasonably well-written, but betrays a perfect American lack of any sense of history." I remember burning with shame and vowing, inwardly, to hell with him! I'll get one of those! I'll get a sense of history if it kills me! And I can't tell you how aggravated I was about twenty years later when I read in something by Milosz: "My whole life has been a struggle to be free of history." By then I felt I had achieved it and felt stuck with it!

I want to talk about Czeslaw Milosz as a teacher in a non-classroom sense, because, from that initial conversation emerged a kind of sympathy

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between a very young writer, which is what I was then, and a very young writer, which Czeslaw always is. We began to work together on translations. At the time, I did not appreciate the unique opportunity to work with a master in something like the traditional European master-apprentice relationship. We would sit side by side and argue, working out, line by line, his poetry and the poetry of Aleksander Wat and others. From the many years we worked together, I remember Berkeley's smell of eucalyptus and tear gas and driving up above that smell to 978 Grizzly Peak Boulevard, and working with Czeslaw. One day we were translating a poem and Czeslaw looked at it and said, "No, it's too smooth; we'll have to roughen it up." It came as an absolute revelation that something could be too smooth and then could be consciously, deliberately, roughened up. I remember becoming three or four degrees more awake when realizing what it meant to have control over material, to be the master of one's craft. As I got a little better at translation, Czeslaw looked at me and said, "You know, Richard, you could make a living at translating." In the sixties, it was considered shameful to think about making a living. The word "professional" was bad; the word "career" was worse; and "success" was absolutely disgusting. And if you put them together, "professional career success"—it was moral death itself. Still, I wasn't entirely stupid and I knew I was going to have to make a living, and it seemed to me a perfect way until I could get to write my own works, to essentially have a literary life and keep the electricity on.

Those hundreds of hours of working with Czeslaw were the true education I received from him. Of course, I profited immensely from his classes. And even the historical consciousness with which I wrestled—before I had it and after I did—came through in the classroom. But when Czeslaw said that I could make a living by translating, he shaped my life: I translated forty books from Polish and Russian, probably four or five million words. A translator has to weigh every word to analyze, feel, taste, and know it. There were times when I cursed Czeslaw, because the profession of translator is neither profitable nor glorious. The translator doesn't get fame, power, or the love of women. If he's lucky, he gets a hundred dollars per thousand words, and immortal fame as a fool if he makes one bad mistake.

When, in 1980, during the strikes in the shipyards in Gdansk, I spoke with Walesa and looked at the monument where words of Milosz had been inscribed, I asked the workers why they had chosen Milosz, who always had been banned. They said yeah, he was always banned, but we always knew him. When I came back to America, Czeslaw asked me, "What was Poland like?" This was in the midst of Solidarity. Compressing months of impressions into a single phrase, I said, "There is no alienation there." Momentarily, the brotherhoood of man had been achieved.

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During the takeover of the shipyards and the negotiations with the Communist Party, a clever filmmaker had gotten hold of cameras and 35mm film and documented the entire process in a hard-hitting documentary called *Workers Eighty*. The authorities confiscated it when martial law was imposed that December, but a copy had gotten to the Pope in Rome, and with Czeslaw acting as a middleman, we got it to New York. It was distributed widely to regular theaters. Thereby, Milosz became something of a film distributor.

It seems fitting to conclude with a poem by Aleksander Wat, which, though exclusively my translation, would never have come to be without Czeslaw. The poem explodes at the end with the footnote of a Christian, which I'll read in a Boston Irish-Catholic accent, which seems perfect for that footnote. "Japanese Archery."

1.
The hand tells the bowstring:
Obey me.

The bowstring answers the hand:
Draw Valiantly

The bowstring tells the arrow:
O arrow, fly.

The arrow answers the bowstring:
Speed my flight.

The arrow tells the target:
Be my light.

The target answers the arrow:
Love me.

2.
The target tells arrow, bowstring, hand and eye:
Ta twam asi.

Which means in a sacred tongue:
I am thou.

3.
(Footnote of a Christian:
O Mother of God,

watch over the target, the bow, the arrow
and the archer).

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MILOSZ'S WORLD TODAY: *ABC'S* TO *ROAD-SIDE DOG*

Robert Faggen: This gathering is not only meant to reflect on the writings and life of Czeslaw Milosz, but to realize that his latest book, *Road-side Dog*, soon will be published in the United States, and that he is currently working on an ABC book. A distinguished panel of critics from Europe and the United States will discuss the impact of his work today. Professor **Jan Blonski**, Poland's leading literary critic, translator, and editor, teaches at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. **Aleksander Fiut**, who has written about Milosz, is also a professor at the Jagiellonian University. **Wojciech Karpinski** lives in Paris; his recent books include *The Emperor's Handkerchief* and *The Shadow of Metternich*. **Madeline Levine** is Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of North Carolina and one of Milosz's translators. **Bronislaw Maj**, one of Poland's leading poets, teaches at the Jagiellonian University as well.

Jan Blonski: Milosz's poetic imagination consists of three layers. The oldest—and probably the most powerful—is from the Enlightenment and the Romantic era, in Mickiewicz's spirit. Like Mickiewicz, Milosz has a visual precision that borders on hallucination; but there is also the harshness that is more concerned with accuracy than with musicality or elegance. The second layer derives from the practice of various twentieth-century *avant-garde* poets; to it Milosz owes the boldness of his metaphors and his search for the exact, striking, or surprising expression. The third layer involves conscious play with the words of others.

Milosz needed time to penetrate the poetic practice of Anglo-Saxons. After he had mastered it, however, he quickly added ambiguity and elusiveness; he belongs to that group of poets who either hide their "I" or reluctantly reveal it in pieces. The reader is astounded by the variety and impenetrability of the masks, costumes, and styles. The poet is not trying to hide anything. On the contrary, he is willing to confide in the reader. However, each time it will be something different and unexpected, so that the listener has the impression that he is being given a secret, or the unexpected opinion of the poet.

The unity of Milosz's poetry, its stylistic, thematic, and formal links, shows up rather feebly; he talks about everything repeatedly, but each time makes the latest statement appear fresh. He is like a painter who happily paints the same scene, the same model, because the light is never the same and the landscape changes through the seasons. Milosz often returns to his own experiences, resuscitates them so they become new. Like a musical theme, his literature keeps moving through keys (styles, patterns, concepts). The factory of the senses works tirelessly, reaching for the most unlikely transmutations of the theme: just as the boat floating down the Wilia River seventy years ago suddenly lands on the island of Yang-Tse-Kiang.

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Milosz is not a poet such as Mallarmé (whom he despises with good reason), who dreams of one absolute masterpiece. His strength lies in what musicians call working the theme, ceaselessly correcting and altering our worldly being. But such a literary act can only be successful if one has enormous stores of words and usages at one's disposal, if one is invested in literary tradition. Where did this adeptness come from? Perhaps one could answer, as Brodsky did at his trial, "Why, I think. . .it's from God." God acted indirectly by repeating the formula already proven by Mickiewicz. "City Winter" has remained the most beautiful poem of the Polish Enlightenment, which in no way distorts his romantic *Ballads and Romances*.

For almost ten years, Milosz played with various *avant-garde* ideas only to surprise readers in "The World" as a poet of aesthetic (and moral) equilibrium, grounded in more than literary tradition. The sources of this beauty are both the juxtaposition of words, as the symbolists and avant-gardists claimed, and the excellence of the imitation, as the traditionalists claimed. Yet Milosz belonged to the Second Vanguard, to a wave of poets who joined formalistic provocations to revolutionary slogans. He was even labeled a Catastrophist. But Europe in the thirties was awaiting a cataclysm, and it would have been hard for artists and poets not to sense it. Milosz's literary youth ended at the time of the apocalypse, in 1941-43.

In 1943 Milosz was irrevocably certain that the real calling of the artist or the poet is imitation. In other words, poems are not born of poems, beauty does not come from the clash of words, and truth is not the reflection of an individual ego or simply a remembrance of a poet's dream. He rarely reveals these convictions, and when he does, he does so cautiously and shamefacedly.

Milosz stubbornly emphasizes the value of hierarchy as the basis of the creative process. A poet should know how to distinguish between the trivial and the significant, the accidental and the essential. This does not mean that he underestimates the trivial or, more generally speaking, the singular; on the contrary, his attention to the specific gives his work its special radiance, the radiance of a singular revelation. In Milosz's opinion, the detail (if appropriately placed and valued) revivifies and reanimates. Thus even the trivial or scandalous can renew itself in an unexpected context: for instance, the inspection of cheerful Parisian girls or the menstrual troubles of his cousins.

At the opposite pole, Milosz does not refrain from pathos, as in "Campo dei Fiori" and other poems written between 1965 and 1974. Pathos usually appears in reference to individual destinies of defeated or forgotten people. In other words, he rectifies the injustice or imbalance the world has not been able to set right. Thus, even he can speak about reactivating or honoring a genuine hierarchy.

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Milosz as a man rarely presents himself. He reveals his peculiarity and richness in the process of getting to know, of "rescuing," the world. When he cannot handle its exuberance and complexity, he creates alter egos. His poetry repeats reality and thereby strengthens the world and being. A poet's "I" is only as important or as essential as he can manage in his work. He can focus on himself, but only to the degree that he puts his insight to use; inner feelings, psychological self-analyses, tastes and pleasures exist primarily to that end. Time, the enemy of man, uses up and somehow undermines being and forces the artist or poet to reactive linguistic formulations, which themselves are already a "repetition" of the world. This is why Milosz constantly returns to his own past, astounded by what he has experienced, and attempts to understand, to plumb, and to refresh. Nothing has been experienced and described once and for all. The present does not cease transforming and impoverishing the transformation.

Milosz insists on returning to critical moments in his life and thereby confesses or strengthens himself lyrically. But his literary wandering in his past does not aim to unveil secrets or idiosyncracies of his "I." Instead, his human traits and skills allow him to grasp and understand the world in which he lives. Of course, he is obsessed with returning to a few dozen places, people, and incidents—to motifs that appeared in his early poetry. This is not because they testify to his sensitivity, but because he cannot get at the truth. And he *must* get at and describe or present it.

These forays into the past cheer and comfort the poet. And getting to know the unknown brings him joy. This accounts for the inclination to repeat in a way that completes, enriches, and unveils what is hidden or inexpressible. Wilno, the city of Milosz's youth, for example, is conceived of lyrically, in a series of flashbacks that summarize its essence. It has fallen into timelessness and immobility because, in memory, people, buildings, and landscapes can exist simultaneously. After this quasi-epiphany comes a text in prose, *A Dictionary of Wilno Streets*. The poet walks his memory along the city and matter-of-factly describes, one after another, the more important stores, houses, and churches. Imperceptibly he assumes the perspective of a maturing boy: from boats and stores he passes to Wilno's ethnic, linguistic, and religious wonders. Thus he moves from dictionary into storytelling. But Milosz's Wilno was Polish; today it is Lithuanian Vilnius. He searches for a language capable of speaking about Vilnius's misfortunes without hatred. In a letter to Venclova, negotiating a kind of "truth about Vilnius," he moves from the persuasive mode into the elegaic. These exotic matters illustrate Milosz's literary strategy. He molds the substance of his poems from his life, not just its auspicious moments, but, insofar as possible, its entirety. Hence the thought about *apokatastasis*—the renewal which so fascinated him in the seventies and to which he remains

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faithful. This kind of renewal is only partly possible, hence the necessity of redoubling the poetic effort, and the passage from simple speech to lofty, from metrical to non-metrical, from learned to simple, from straight to ironic, ecstatic to cynical. Once again, there is the issue of appropriateness, so disdained by contemporaries. Everything deserves a word that will bring it closer and domesticate it.

Few poets give the world such an emphatic "yes" and at the same time trust so doggedly in the possibilities of imitation. All possible literary configurations—stylistic and lexical—are put to the task. The world is worth describing, Milosz seems to say, and it allows itself to be described. Thank you.

Alexander Fiut: The river of Milosz's childhood fused with Heraclitus's river in his matriculation essay. It also merged with Lethe, the river of forgetting, from whose powers he protected himself and us with every word he wrote. The meanings of the river ordered almost every theme and recurrent motif. Black waters lapped at Milosz's pre-war poems. He writes: "Under various names, I have praised only you, rivers! / You are milk and honey and love and death and dance." The river becomes a symbol of what a human existence is—life-giving and destructive, unending and ephemeral, elusive and unyielding, recorded in myth and debated by philosophers. It is the most ancient representation of time, which flows quickly and imperceptibly and can only be frozen for an instant in memory. Thus in remembering an old love, he asks: Was she then a cloud / Or a river wave, and did she return / To nonexistence" ["A Photograph"]. The river also was the site of initiations: into erotic ecstasy, as in the poem "Capri," and into the child's first delights. His mother, Milosz confesses, taught him to pronounce the names of the rivers "with respect yet tenderly." It is noteworthy that only the river is rescued from the deathly power of nature; it glistens and gleams with an extraordinary multiplicity of meanings.

In the volume of poems *Facing the River*, Milosz states: "Wherever I wandered, through whatever continents, my face was / always turned to the river" ["In Szetejnie"]. This means that to place a foot on the bank of the river is to find oneself in a place where two basic elements meet. It is also the drawing of a seemingly indestructible line. Yet one of the most striking features later on is his stubborn insistence on crossing the uncrossable limits—of time and space, of a single life and one epoch, of one's own body and one's native culture. There were many such journeys in his earlier poems. Now, however, he takes this type of excursion more frequently. It is difficult to list the many variants and possibilities. Milosz always easily visited a bygone world, but a journey to just one moment in time no longer satisfies him. "House in Krasnogruda" depicts the same place in various historical periods. The former Catastrophist answers the hypothetical

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question of what our planet will look like when there are no more people ["The Thistle, the Nettle"]. More and more frequently and with greater and greater freedom, he visits worlds beyond. In "Creating the World," he watches as "Celestians at the Board of Projects" multiply naked forms of beings that make them laugh. If the Charon of the imagination rows him to the other side, he will describe—with humor, and not quite in keeping with a Christian imagination—the posthumous adventures of a certain soul, as in "Happening Elsewhere."

Milosz has a special interest in the boundaries between a work and its author, the permanence of art and its accidental nature—that is, the historical changeability of standards by which art is judged. Even as a student, he tells us in "A Lecture," he was irritated by the pretensions of hermetic *avant-garde* poetry, which separated itself highmindedly from the crimes of the twentieth century. Time, however, seems to crown victorious those who, like Paul Valéry, polish the crystalline form of their poems, avoiding the "unreasonable affairs of mortals." A basic lack of reconciliation to the world as it is, as well as remaining "in the same unnamed service," is called "the practice of composing verses." This allows him to understand someone as different from himself as Allen Ginsberg ["To Allen Ginsberg"].

In keeping with Heraclitus's recommendation, Milosz's recent volumes recall contradictions, and meditate on the puzzling interdependencies of components of being. Milosz would certainly repeat after the philosopher of Ephesus, not just that "it is not possible to step into the same river twice" (an allusion is contained in "Elegy for N. N."), but that "we step and don't step into the same river."

Couldn't one, the poet seems to ask, derive some artistic and intellectual profit even from collective failures and mistakes? The horror and lameness of the twentieth century can also be instructive. Numerous victims of "dictators' dreams" might rise above those who are "unwilling to think of the punishment that awaits / All those who are too much in love with life" ["At Yale"]. The river of his youth "with heaps of garbage on its banks, with the beginning of pollution" warns against "the longing for ideal places on the earth" ["Capri"].

Milosz is ruled by two clear, mutually exclusive, tendencies. First, the striving to abbreviate and condense meaning, a distinct conciseness coupled with clarity and simplicity. He draws a figure with just a few strokes or evokes what is conventionally called the spirit of the epoch. Second, the inclination to make a text ambiguous. Between the crystal-clear images are silences and dark places as in the cycles of poems "At Yale," "Far Away," and "To My Daimonion." He moves between paradoxes. At times, the meaning of the poem is undermined by his own commentary, as in

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"Gathering Apricots." He even juxtaposes two poems whose eloquence contradicts, but then supplies them with an interpretation that annihilates their meaning ["Conversation with Jane" and "A Poem for the End of the Century"]. What is dark he illumines, and darkens what is bright. The following fragment of "Capri" is illustrative:

> Now I know foolishness is necessary in all our designs, so that they are realized, awkwardly and incompletely.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Together with my epoch I go away, prepared for a verdict, that will count me among its phantoms.
>
> If I accomplished anything, it was only when I, a pious boy, chased after the disguises of the lost Reality.
>
> After the real presence of divinity in our flesh and blood which are at the same time bread and wine,
>
> Hearing the immense call of the Particular, despite the earthly law that sentences memory to extinction.

We ought to have a study on Milosz's use of prepositions and conjunctions, which introduce juxtapositions, or the conditional mood like "if." Some have even become titles of poems, such as "And Yet," and "Either-Or." And not without reason, as he writes in "A Philosopher's Home," are his indefatigable interests aroused by all the "Circumstances and coincidences, such as are or might have been, all those or 'because ofs,' 'if nots,' and 'if onlys.'" They activate meaning, turn it around the way a rapid current swirls stones. They allow one to contain, partially at least, the multiplicity of phenomena as well as the variety of their conceptual and artistic means of expression.

Beyond the ever-changing forms of the river's current, Milosz always manages to notice the eternal or metaphysical dimension of being. His senses denote every single grain of existence. His work responds more and more to "the immense call of the Particular, despite the earthly law that sentences memory to extinction." And the "pious boy" hidden in him chases indefatigably "after the disguises of the lost Reality."

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Wojciech Karpinski: *Road-side Dog* is a wonderful volume of poetry that will soon appear in English. It is written by a man in his ninth decade, an exceptional achievement both in Polish literature and in our times. The book's strength is its simplicity; it forgoes complicated intellectual analyses, displays of erudition, linguistic acrobatics, and semantic games. There are no flights of lofty style. These poems are sketches from life, surprising in their baldness and accuracy, which belong to the very essence of poetry. The essences of *Road-side Dog* are amazingly close to the experience of life in moments of radiant awareness, untainted by patterns of rational speculation. The meaning of these "existential essences" is not easy to grasp. These poems are the unprecedented accomplishment of an eminent writer who, late in life, discards the crutches and fetters of strict forms and speaks with youthful directness. In *Road-side Dog*, Milosz provocatively and courageously reveals his own truth, without fear of being labeled old-fashioned.

The book brings to mind pages from Joseph Czapski's *Diary*. In Milosz and in Czapski there is a similar yearning to explode forms and patterns, a similar linguistic effort. Czapski would have been delighted with Milosz's new book—and so would Nicolo Chiaromonte, whom Milosz, in his *ABC Book*, named as one of the heroic personalities of the twentieth century.

In reading *Road-side Dog* I wonder if Milosz merely breaks with the constraints of form and current fashion. He begins by confessing: "I set off to know my earth in a horse-drawn wagon, with a large supply of horse-feed and a tin pail clanging in the back." I looked at this new foray and returned not just to Milosz's poetic works, but to *Garden of Knowledge* and *Land of Ulro*. Pages I had read many times drew me into new lands.

Road-side Dog and the associated readings made me realize more forcefully than ever before that in tracking Milosz's growing body of work, I have participated in an unusual spiritual task. Indeed, I have watched with wonder and fascination. But for an instant I am ashamed to take pride in someone else's accomplishments and remember Gombrowicz's words: "The hell with geniuses!" Yet I recall that Gombrowicz, when thinking of Mickiewicz in partisan terms, saw the limitations that restrained him and, like Moses, wanted to lead his fellow Poles out of those limitations. I also remember Milosz's warnings in "Zeal" in *Garden of Knowledge*: "He would be deluding himself who thought that his own being first- or second-rate depended solely on him and not on the culture in which he was brought up." Milosz attached exceptional weight to the idea of the "estate" of a given culture, a given literature as well as the estate of a given person.

Milosz's accomplishments have determined his importance. *Road-side Dog* becomes our earth, unattainable yet constantly seen anew with renewed powers of observation. We should follow his advice in *Road-side*

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Dog and "bark up," with as much jubilation as possible, the accomplishments of others of this magnitude. Thank you.

Madeline Levine: The title of my paper is "*Abecadlo Milosza* and Milosz's Third Unwritten Novel." The ABC book is a familiar genre in Polish letters, a loose form that allows the author to chat, pontificate, be witty or sentimental, and to mix extensive biographical essays with summary, often acid, judgments about the famous or not-so-famous people he has known or thought about. The authorial voice can vary from page to page so that one moment the reader is made privy to the colorful ramblings of an avuncular *gawedziarz*, while in the next moment a single trenchant sentence destroys with mordant wit any sublime notions the reader may have entertained. Entries in these books are arranged in alphabetical order, conveniently obscuring whatever principle of selection or lack thereof underlies the finished volume. A more permissive variant of the genre includes serious mini-essays or expansive riffs on any topic of interest to the author. It is a genre ideally suited to a writer in search of a more spacious form. *Abecadlo Milosza*, his recently published ABC book with its 133 alphabetized entries, fits squarely into that genre.

Opening it at random, one can find entries on famous writers such as Balzac, Baudelaire, Maritain. There's an entry on American poetry, which is mainly about Whitman, and one on the Polish language. There's a wonderful vignette about a community of *Duchobortsy*. Isadora Duncan is recalled and Mary McCarthy; Arthur Koestler gets an entry and so do Anna and Dorcio Druzyno, those two spinster sisters first evoked in verse. A duty to preserve their memory is proclaimed: "No one but me recalls their names anymore." There are entries labeled Unhappiness, Economics, The City, Martinique and Guadalupe, and of course Alcohol. The one called Biographies instructs us: "Of course all biographies are false, not excluding my own which the reader might feel inclined to divine from this ABC book." "The value of biographies," the entry concludes, "rests solely on their ability to reveal more or less the epoch during which a given life was lived." Most of the ABC book entries are biographical, but autobiographically so. The individuals recalled are for the most part linked directly to Milosz's life. His readers have met them before, so that the *Abecadlo* is a regathering, a reunion of sorts of the poet's friends and acquaintances with the updates and reconfirmations appropriate to such a social gathering.

It is fun to play with *The ABC Book* as if it were a kind of hypertext novel, ignoring its alphabetical ordering and imposing an order of one's own. One can marshal its entries into thematically organized subsections,

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tease out of it clues to the carefully masked private life of the author though he warns us against this, or, as the blurb on the back cover suggests, group the entries around the geographical stages of Milosz's personal odyssey: Wilno, Warszawa, Washington, Paris, Berkeley, and now Krakow. Today I propose to read *The ABC Book* as its author's latest revisiting of a hypothetical novel about the twentieth century, which he has been writing and rewriting for half a century or more. In *A Year of the Hunter* he gave us a description of what such a novel should be like:

> I would like to read a novel about the twentieth century: not one of those allegories in which human affairs are depicted metaphorically, but a novel, a report about many characters and their actions. It would have to be an international novel, since the century is international, despite the rise of all sorts of nationalisms. I cannot find such a novel, so it would be necessary to write it—and I am curious as to whether there is someone, somewhere, who feels capable of creating it. The currently fashionable narrative techniques—in the first person and about oneself—are an obstacle. It would have to be a panorama employing representative characters, as in Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*. And the heroes should not be ordinary, gray; on the contrary, they would be modelled on colorful, exceptional personalities. . . .The book would not be limited to clashes of views and positions, although the Naphta-Settembrini quarrel in Thomas Mann would be reborn in a new shape. . . .So, a novel of the life of the higher intellectual spheres.

Czeslaw Milosz has created such a novel. He doesn't know he's written it, but it has been appearing in segments for decades. Milosz's own use of first-person narration has not been an obstacle to its creation. Far from it. Its central text is *A Year of the Hunter*. But bits and pieces of it appear elsewhere as sketches, variants, and false starts. *The ABC Book* concerns and refines its vision. Early sketches for it go as far back as *The Captive Mind* (though not only there because the same philosophical clash resurfaces repeatedly in Milosz's writings) where the Naphta-Settembrini quarrel was indeed reborn. The four Polish writers who appear in *The Captive Mind*, driven by their personal demons and seduced by the deadly logic of dialectical materialism, are introduced as if they were characters in an historical drama, each invented to demonstrate the theses expounded in the impassioned theoretical chapters. Alpha, the moralist; Beta, the disappointed lover; Gamma, the slave of history; and Delta, the troubadour: each returns under his own name in book after book after book as the hypothetical novel takes shape. The novelist Andrzejewski, the poet and short story

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writer Borowski, the Writer's Union functionary Putrament, and the poet Galczyński reappear in *The History of Polish Literature*, then in *A Year of the Hunter*, and once more in *The ABC Book*. Putrament and Galczyński are also brought back in Milosz's most recent collection of essays, *Life on Islands*. In the course of the retellings, their images softened and nuanced by the distancing of time, they become better than real. They rise to the level of wonderfully sketched fictional characters of an enthralling *Zeitroman*. Andrzejewski, Borowski, Galczyński, and Putrament do not appear in *The ABC Book* as separate entries. Their names surface repeatedly, however, in entries devoted to others, as if to demonstrate that they were inseparable from their time. *The Seizure of Power*, which addresses those same issues in fictional form, is not a particularly successful novel, although it is a superb dramatization of what one critic has aptly referred to as "the crushing hopelessness, the utter desolation, and the dismal atmosphere" of the first years of Communist rule in Poland. Unlike the hypothetical novel dreamt of by Milosz some forty years later, *The Seizure of Power* is not international in scope. Its world has been narrowed to Poland in the grip of the Soviet Union. The novel's many characters, struggling intellectually and morally with the limited political choices available to them rarely come alive as individuals. They remain incarnate political positions, stock characters in a new kind of terrifying morality play.

Milosz's evolving novel begins to take a more dramatic shape with *Native Realm*—a book that originated in "a desire to bring Europe closer to the Europeans" and evolved into "a quest, a voyage, into the heart of my own, yet not only my own, past." It asserts the disintegration of all barriers "between the individual and the social, between style and institution, between aesthetics and politics." This is where we first encounter the mystic poet Oscar Milosz, with his disdain for the "age of jeering ugliness" and his prophetic visions of the coming world war, and also "Tiger," Tadeusz Kroński, who "had persuaded himself that in the last analysis his deceit served the truth." In Milosz's fascination with each of them, and particularly in his anguished retelling of how Tiger opted to serve Poland's Communist regime while he himself became a defector, the great intellectual debates and moral tensions of the century are bodied forth.

Thirty years after *Native Realm*, Milosz was still engaged in his search for self-definition, but by the time he came to write *A Year of the Hunter* in 1987-88 he was a Nobel Laureate, a writer whose works had been translated into many more languages than he himself could read. It doesn't take much critical acuity to notice that *A Year of the Hunter* is only masquerading as a journal. Milosz the diarist, almost frenetically in motion from airport to airport, from one speaking engagement to another as he crisscrosses the continent and flies back and forth across the ocean, seems to

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have become his boyhood hero who possesses the magical gift of flight. Just like Selma Lagerlöf's Nils, he "flies above the earth and looks at it from above but at the same time sees it in every detail." Again and again Milosz returns in this journal to the task that seems to obsess him: to record and interpret the political and psychological temperature of two critical eras, the interwar decades and the immediate postwar years. With its cast of hundreds (literally) and its forgiving loose structure, *A Year of the Hunter* is like an intermittent novel teeming with characters who are evoked for a moment, only to vanish into the memories from which they are conjured. Who are they?

The central character of Milosz's prose writings is Milosz himself. His vast acquaintance over a long life provides a link to almost everyone mentioned in the book who was alive during his lifetime. The two main exceptions to this rule of personal acquaintance are the tyrants whose reigns of terror frame and define the century, Hitler and Stalin. In fact, if an individual is mentioned repeatedly or at length in *The ABC Book* as well as in *A Year of the Hunter,* he (much less frequently, *she*) is central to Milosz's universe and hence to his evolving novel. If we think of *A Year of the Hunter* as the central text of this hypothetical novel of the century and *The ABC Book* as a corroborating second pass at getting its story told, this test makes sense. The evolving novel I am positing here fits the criteria enumerated by Milosz in his description of the ideal novel of the century. It would have to be an international novel, he said. Certainly the action, the characters, and the references to historical events are international in scope, though definitely not global. Europe, arranged along its Lithuanian-Polish-French axis in the shadow of its Soviet neighbor, and North America are its main locales. Time is fluid, multi-layered. Transience and simultaneity of remembered time are important themes. The main twentieth-century historical periods are, as one would expect, the thirties, the wartime occupation, the postwar years of high Stalinism—but, just as in the lyric poems, vivid memories surface from the early childhood years. There are plenty of colorful exceptional personalities, mostly writers and public intellectuals, but only a minority would be immediately familiar to the general reader: Sartre, Camus, perhaps Simone Weil, Dwight Macdonald, Mary McCarthy. Most of the characters are Polish but many of them are no doubt as unfamiliar to most Polish readers today as to Americans. Robespierre, the Byrskis, Nela and Boleslaw Miciński, the shunned novelist Józef Mackiewicz—all with complicated fates and painful choices imposed by history. If we have been reading Milosz's prose work for some time all these little-known figure become familiar to us. Like characters in a leisurely novel they appear and reappear, living their lives only on the plane their author-narrator wishes to explore. They live the life of the

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mind or pit themselves against reason. They engage history or are blindsided by it. They sometimes appear to be playing their roles in a morality play. Milosz the prose writer has an eye for the telling detail, the special character trait that both defines the individual and reveals the crushing weight of his time. What novelist would not have wished to invent a character such as the Polish stage director Leon Schiller, the "dogmatic communist by day [who] prostrated himself before the crucifix at night"? Or Stanislawa Umińska, the glamorous actress whom a French jury refused to convict for the mercy-killing of her terminally ill lover, and who then became a nun and eventually the mother superior of a convent where, during the war and in defiance of Gestapo rules, Leon Schiller's nativity play was performed in secret by adolescent prostitutes before an audience that contained Czeslaw Milosz and Jerzy Andrzejewski. The final *desideratum* for Milosz's hypothetical novel is the character of a writer, "presumably glued together from several famous names and not treated too kindly—for who, if not writers, allowed themselves to be deceived by stupid ideologues and then excelled in seducing minds?" he writes. Actually a plethora of writers inhabit the constituent parts of Milosz's unacknowledged novel, but the unifying character is the most complex writer of all, Czeslaw Milosz himself. His evolving novel of the twentieth century, ever a work in progress, ultimately depends on its creation's consciousness. He is the authoritative narrator. Even when he admits to doubts and regrets, he leaves no room for an alternative narrative. We remain in the grip of his vision: this terrible century, for all its horror, is the best of times to remember. No one has yet written a fictional account of it to rival Czeslaw Milosz's, and it's a safe bet that no one will.

Bronislaw Maj: To speak about Milosz's presence in Polish literature and Polish life, to talk about his various and profound influence on so many areas of this life, and to talk about this in the presence of Czeslaw Milosz is difficult. One needs either extraordinary courage or extraordinary impudence. But I'll try.

To be the poet of a nation that, by decree of history, possesses nothing but "the words of the poet" is a strange and pathetically ironic adventure. If language, speech, is everything that a nation possesses, then the fate of that poet is different than in nations with a "normal" history; one expects this poet to take on other responsibilities and roles, more specific forms of being present. Therefore, Milosz's presence in Polish culture and in history is not just the presence of a great poet. Surely the purity of Walt Whitman's phrase is not the only reason to be proud of being American; a German does not build his destiny exclusively on the foundation of Goethe's writing, nor a Frenchman on Paul Valéry's stanzas.

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Milosz's presence is not even the presence of the greatest poet of the twentieth century, or of one of the three main pillars of Polish poetry, next to Jan Kochanowski and Adam Mickiewicz.

More precisely, Milosz's influence does not derive from an imposition of aesthetic paths or themes or problems (after all, every poet has his own subjects and obsessions), nor from the suggested profundity and intensity of his experience and thought or broad knowledge. Instead, one has to speak about the various forms of his presence, about his various roles. Only the unusual sum of these constitutes Milosz's presence. But at various moments in Polish history and in Polish literature, Milosz's work was a source of many lessons and insights, in three odd stages forced by the history of Poland.

First, in the thirties he was a free poet in a free country. But then the paranoia began. In the second stage, he was an underground poet publishing his poems in the postwar years. From then until he left the country he maintained poetic freedom within the framework of a totalitarian system. And finally, for a few decades, emigration—the bitter fate of a poet who did not exist in the literature of his language. This absence was broken by the Nobel Prize, after which the authorities could no longer pretend that Milosz the poet did not exist. But Milosz's presence becomes "normal," like that of every other living classic, only after 1989.

Each of these stages demanded a different kind of presence, delineated other sphere of influence, communicated different inspirations and different models. In the thirties, the young Milosz was the trenchant poet of a tragic epoch in transition, a poet-prophet, warning of global cataclysm, a scholar and judge of history. More significant and longer-lasting than Milosz's Catastrophic phase is his poetic vision on a grand scale with its multiple dimensions of history—a vision with historicist, eschatological, and metaphysical perspective. The tone of his poetry is grave, even when using irony. And he believes in the gravity and dignity of the poetic word. Milosz the prophet is at the same time analyst, scholar, and moralist. This poetry brings him closer to the the great nineteenth-century Polish poet Norwid. In Milosz's historicist poetry, there is a visible ethical position and a Christian foundation based on the values of truth and justice. But he is also a scholar of evil, the perennial element in human history, and a Manichean. And a judge and critic—full of irony and insight into his own people and their traditions. Later his distance enables a sober, acute vision and augury, and acquires another dimension: émigré distance. Playing the traditional role of a Polish poet, Milosz simultaneously rebels against it. He rebels, particularly against the Romantic stereotype of a poet-bard, a leader. He also steers clear of partisan verse. But, during martial law, apocryphal Milosz poems appeared, anticipating his voice.

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Emigration, a difficult and weighty experience, paradoxically gave him renewed vigor; it strengthened and deepened his voice. California became the proverbial "Archimedes point," providing acute vision—of Europe, of Poland, and of communism—because it was coming from without. It also gave him the chance to be universal and to liberate himself from provincialism, from the barren entanglement with the "Red Monster." Poland was his homeland and thus his exile was felt even more keenly.

Milosz is both a poet-explorer and poet-legislator of new forms and ways of speaking. He has expanded poetry's borders. In searching for a more "spacious form," he freshens and revives old literary genres and modernizes them. At the same time, as in *Road-side Dog*, he constructs new forms. By reviving discourse in poetry, he restores to it the ability to speak of even the most difficult and complex issues. Milosz indicates and determines the farthest reaches and poles of poetic speech, from a Norwidian historicism ("Oeconomia Divina") to Kochanowski's "poetry faithful to reality" ("Gift"), from prophecy and great synthesis of the epoch ("Child of Europe") to the pure delight of epiphany ("Happiness"), from the austere moral climate of a treatise to the evangelical simplicity of the naive poems in "The World."

Milosz's poetry can best be described as the enormous delta of a great river. The boundaries and expanse of the delta are equivalent to the boundaries of speech. The river's main current is the "pure current" of the Polish language; its numerous branches, tributaries, streams, and sources create the complete map of modern Polish poetry.

The Polish school of poetry, as Milosz himself calls it, took two very different traits from him: hierarchy of values and gravity of subject matter, and the weighty issues and gravity of the poetic word. The main current of the Miloszian river is the continuity, into our time, of the line created by his predecessors, the sixteenth-century poet Jan Kochanowski and the nineteenth-century poet Adam Mickiewicz.

The word "rescue" (the title of Milosz's best known volume of poetry) has two meanings in Polish: rescue, as in being rescued from something, and survival, as in being saved for something. "What is pronounced strengthens itself. / What is not pronounced tends to nonexistence" ("Reading the Japanese Poet Issa"). This poetry rescues from nothingness; in naming, it saves the world; there is more of the world because it has been named. And it saves us, too, from nothingness—for being. Thank you.

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TOMAS VENCLOVA AND W. S. MERWIN

Robert Faggen: This evening we will have **W. S. Merwin** and **Tomas Venclova** read to us.

Tomas Venclova: I write in Lithuanian, which is a beautiful language but most of the audience is not familiar with it. So my former student, friend, and translator, **Diana Senechal**, will read my work in English. But before each poem I will make a few comments, because some of them touch on esoteric topics of Eastern European history, and of my own history. I will start with a poem by Czeslaw Milosz translated into Lithuanian. Most of you probably know it: "You Who Wronged." I will read it in Lithuanian. [Reads poem.]

My own next poem, "The Member of the Landing Crew," is one of the most recently translated by Diana. It is about the Lithuanian émigrés who secretly went to their homeland (annexed by the USSR) during the late 1940s and early 1950s. They were helped, to a degree, by the British Intelligence Service. Owing to the efforts of Kim Philby and his collaborators, they usually were met by Soviet units posing as anti-Communist guerrillas. Most of them were killed or sent to prison camps, and more than one was recruited by the KGB. It's a cruel story of the postwar period. The cuckoo is another thing to be explained. Diana told me that the only place she had heard the cuckoo was in the clock. But in Eastern Europe cuckoos are quite common forest birds and Lithuanians, Russians, and Poles share an old belief: when you hear the cuckoo cry, the number of cries indicates the number of years that you will go on living.

Diana Senechal: "The Member of the Landing Crew."

> The hardest thing to do was to hide the boats they had dragged up onto
> the sand,
> to cut up the tight rubber, shove the scraps under the bushes,
> to ignore the prickly rain that comes before the dawn,
>
> inundating the spine. The low pines kept silent across the dunes.
> When the line moved, he sighed. His esophagus
> recalled the memory of yesterday's seasickness,
>
> and his shoulders, the strap of the backpack. Penicillin, binoculars,
> ammunition, written off of army storage the year before last,
> a letter from an old minister with the words "long live unity."
>
> The needle of the compass danced out the ritual klumpakojis dance.
> Eight kilometers down the road, next to the deserted farm,
> he'd have to encounter the Bear, the Fern Blossom and the Goat—

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nicknames from fables. An unfamiliar group stomped its feet
in the glade. The commander, whom he had seen somewhere before
in the unfinished war, said the password. Alleviated,

his companions disappeared in the dugout, but he lagged behind. His boot
slipped on the mossy tussock by the stream, and the blow,
missing the back of his head, landed in his elbow. Grabbing

his holster in a rush, he was able to feel
the muscles in his kneeling leg tense; he saw the black aperture
before his eyes and grasped: well, that guy is quicker. [. . .]

Tomas Venclova: The next poem is about the house of my childhood in Kaunas, which I recently visited. Of course, it belongs to someone else now. "A View from an Alley."

Where gooseberries used to grow, new landlords have turned up the soil.
The courtyard is tightly sealed from the street's chestnut trees
by a dark bluish double fence. All dimensions have shrunk,
except for time. There was more space here than childhood alone can
explain.
Squinting, you can still climb the dissolved staircase
up to the attic, where the floor still squeaks under your cousin's steps.
For long? He asked us then. *Only for one night* (but that happened later).
On the first floor a mass of mirror turned to stone, easily meshing
the hoarfrost of a faraway storm, the crown of a plum tree, a flask
rich with dense scents. These early insomnias: the chime
through the wall, helping us understand that everything passes,
but not soon; that time depends on speech,
that the worst case scenario turns out a little less
than what we can bear. A heaven of photographs behind the door.
In one I make out a shadow with a glass of cherry juice
and a dog. These snapshots still live somewhere,
although few people today would be able to figure them out.
The dog is buried in the corner of the kitchen garden
(now I cannot see the place behind the double fence)
and the shadow, pressing the glass to his mouth, still glides
on the surface of objects, next to the ribbed wallpaper,
the destitute greenery, the littered years, which belong
not to him, nor to the new landlords, a little more real than he.
No one knows what matches this dead space,
this empty cell in the net of alleys:
indifference or pain? Strangely, they coincide.

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The next poem, in the same vein, is about the return of a singer, the famous Russian singer Chaliapin. His apartment in Moscow was turned into a so-called communal flat by the Soviets. Whoever has read Joseph Brodsky's essay "A Room and a Half" knows about those communal flats—a bathroom and kitchen shared by up to seventeen families. I spent some time in my early youth in Chaliapin's former flat. My friends and I arranged some unofficial exhibitions of abstract paintings there, since abstract paintings were strictly banned in the Soviet Union. Of course, there were also some strictly private memories related to that flat. Now it has been turned into a museum and, instead of those rather naive abstract paintings, it has quite good paintings formerly belonging to Chaliapin. I am rather happy that the singer finally got his rooms back, but at the same time it feels somewhat less authentic than it used to. "The Return of the Singer."

In this dark state, the snow is white as before.

Under wheels, the asphalt squeaks, ice-crusted and clear.
If the pupil, cornea, ruins of the retina survive,
soon we'll see a new millenium outside.

The river leaps on the threshhold, waves knock on the door,
and the bygone century returns to its home of yore.

Its confused space has undergone several remodelings,
while the faded pictures have found a silk drawing room

where the holes in the plaster were patched up with other textures
matchmakers, confidants, unifying and forbidden treasure).

Already you and I see only what really was there:
collapsing stoves, a room that many came to share.

Squinting slightly, you perceive a costume of the stage,
a billiard, shelves, the sum of another age;

in the curtain's creases, pockets of old air are hidden,
but for them, as for me, your body is now forgotten.

There are no roads into the senseless terrains,
where dilapidated posters once extolled the czardom of mines

and missiles, where candles used to drip sweat on the table,
where equal affection, as always, was not possible.

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Let us stand on between the museum box office and the yellow
plane of a rug. A few rooms away, in the ribbed hollow

of the recordplayer, the landlord's famed bass swells
and tumbles into the abyss. He was an émigré as well.

These cubic meters, split into passion and void,
preserved only the second part. As if after a fire, we toyed

with time in the snow. Only bricks and pipes remained.
This dark is meeting other eyes, not yours, not mine.

The next poem is "Pestel Street." Pestel Street is in St. Petersburg—formerly Leningrad, formerly St. Petersburg. It is the street where Joseph Brodsky lived. He never went back. He died in New York and recently was buried in Venice. I visited his old house in the year 1988, at the very beginning of *perestroika,* after slipping into the Soviet Union on a tourist visa for eight days. "Pestel Street." [Reads poem]

The next poem is about the events in Lithuania in January 1990 when the Soviets took the television tower in Vilnius and thirteen people died, including a young girl and the son of one of my former schoolmates. A film was made about the events and reached the United States. I attempted to show it in Urbana-Champagne, but interest was minimal. After the film there was a sort of discussion with another émigré professor. This is the topic of my poem.

A projector flickers in the somewhat cramped hall.
Only three viewers. Four, including one
who came from far away, who suggested this film
to his students. The oblong box preserves
a country where not even stones (or friends,
for that matter) remember him. Several languages
jostle in the subconscious. Garlands, faces,

and banners overcome the hanging blackness.
It's all unruly and festive. He who grew up
in a feastless state cannot bring himself
to look at the screen. He already knows
what's in store: dark warm bloodstains
and mud. No telling them apart, no telling
letters from fire, or truth from nothingness.

The heat drags down the university town.
Jasmines, fainting into a nod, surround

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the ballast-covered paths and sweaty lawns,
where the water sprinkler fires away in series.
Distances grow. The newcomer tells his neighbor,
"But everything turned out well in the end—"
and tries hard to believe what he is saying.

W. S. Merwin: Thank you, Tomas. I want to say thank you too for the chance to be here, to say some things about and to Czeslaw, and to thank everybody who's responsible for making that possible.

It was well over forty years ago that I first read some poems by Czeslaw Milosz and they stayed in my mind. Later I found them again in his *Anthology of Postwar Polish Poetry*, a book that was important to me then and has been ever since. I think with thanks of the great voices that I first heard then that were to go on resounding in my private pantheon, but before that anthology had been published I'd incurred another debt to Milosz. In London in the fifties, during what was clearly a time of transition in my own life and writing, a period of examination and reassessment of what I thought it was about and what I was doing and why, I opened a book by Milosz that I had bought in the States. It was *The Captive Mind*, a book that seemed to speak directly to my concerns about the relation of poetry to history and the experience of history. In the fifties I was calling into question, among other things, many assumptions about poetry and purpose, the conventions of poetry, the sense of it, and in the meantime hardly writing at all, wondering when I would write again, knowing that when I did it would have to be different in some unforeseeable way from what I had written until then. So it was a singularly raw and receptive moment full of the awareness of the passing of youth. *The Captive Mind* lit up for me like a landscape under incendiary bombardment. The passage I refer to in particular began this way—I'm quoting parts and leaving out others:

> The Eastern intellectual. . .is a severe critic. . . .he does not want cheap consolation which will eventually prove all the more depressing. The war has left him suspicious and highly skilled in unmasking sham and pretense. . . .The work of human thought *should* stand the test of brutal, naked reality. . . .Probably only those things are worthwhile which can preserve their validity in the eyes of a man threatened with instant death.

The following part remained almost word for word in my head:

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> A man is lying under machine gun fire on a street in an embattled city. He looks at the pavement and sees a very amusing sight: the cobblestones are standing upright like the quills of a porcupine. The bullets hitting their edges displace and tilt them. Such moments in the consciousness of a man *judge* all poets and philosophers. Let us suppose, too, that a certain poet was the hero of the literary cafés. . . .his poems, recalled in such a moment, suddenly seem diseased and highbrow. The vision of the cobblestones is unquestionably real, and poetry based on equally *naked* experience could survive triumphantly that judgment day of man's illusions.

Here was a criterion that in later consideration would seem even plainer. Confronted with such a moment, what poetry would I want to remember? It was a criterion that immediately seemed indispensable to me. I wanted to write something that others would want to take with them at such a time; an impossible standard, perhaps, but it was a relief knowing it was there, that it was what I hoped to do, whether it was possible or not.

I do not remember whether I wrote to Milosz after I read the book or whether we came to exchange letters about something else, but not long after that he came to visit me at the old farmhouse in France in the Quercy, which I had bought with my last penny when I was twenty-four. I was just over thirty when he came and full of deep admiration for this man who had lost and seen and articulated so much. That part of the Quercy seemed more remote, more wild, closer to the last century and to the Europe of the Middle Ages, the troubadours, the Roman Empire, and to the time of the caves and the aurochs before them than it does now, decades later with autoroutes and conveniences and tourism, though it has survived better than many places. Czeslaw wanted to see some of that country, and on foot, and I led him up into the upland where one could walk all day and meet no one, finding remains and farms and settlements of indeterminate age, recalling periods before World War I and before the phylloxera and before the revolution. There were wild boar and foxes sometimes and birds, so many birds. We walked for hours and when we got back to the village Czeslaw thanked me with an evident depth of feeling that took me by surprise and mumbled something about not having realized that any such place still survived and about it recalling to him the country he remembered as a child, the place before *The Captive Mind* and the land, I later supposed, of his ancestor, Oscar V. de L. Milosz, another great figure to whom Czeslaw introduced me.

Some years later, reading a poem of Czeslaw's entitled "With Trumpets and Zithers," written in 1965, I found this line: "An immense night of July filled my mouth with a taste of rain and / near Puybrun by the bridges my childhood was given back." Some misplaced reticence has always withheld

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me from asking Czeslaw about that line. It sometimes seemed to me that there is a kind of impertinence in inquiring about the literal sources of perceptions once they have been transformed into poetry, though I realize that such inhibitions would hamper much literary gossip and much valuable literary commentary, but I do not know whether that line or some others near it may have any relation to that visit and that walk, although Puybrun is there in the valley below the farmhouse some miles away, and we can tell from the sound of the train on the railroad bridge what the coming day's or night's weather might be. In another section of the poem he mentions *The Adventures of Telemachus*, the seventeenth-century novel by Fenelon, who lived at Carennac some miles farther down the river. Czeslaw's is a poem of eleven sections, but I will not read more than two, much as I love it all, but I want them to represent not only the rest of the poem but the whole body of Czeslaw's poetry and my gratitude and love for it as they have grown over the years. This is section 5, a short one.

> The scent of freshly mown clover redeemed the perished armies and
> the meadows glittered in headlights forever.
> An immense night of July filled my mouth with a taste of rain and
> near Puybrun by the bridges my childhood was given back.
> The warm encampment of crickets chirped under a low cloud just
> as in our lost homelands where a wooden cart goes creaking.
> Borne by an inscrutable power, one century gone, I heard, beating
> in darkness, the heart of the dead and the living.

And this is section 10:

> The dream shared at night by all people has inhabitants, hairy
> animals.
> It is a huge and snug forest and everyone entering it walks on all
> fours till dawn through the very thick of the tangle.
> Through the wilderness inaccessible to metal objects, all-embracing
> like a warm and deep river,
> In satin tunnels the touch distinguishes apples and their color that
> does not recall anything real.
> All are quadrupeds, their thighs rejoice at the badger-bear softness,
> their rosy tongues lick each other's fur.
> The "I" is felt with amazement in the heartbeat, but so large it
> cannot be filled by the whole Earth with her seasons.
> Nor would the skin guarding a different essence trace any boundary.
> Later on, in crude light, separated into you and me, they try with a
> bare foot pebbles of the floor.

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The two-legged, some to the left, some to the right, put on their
belts, garters, slacks, and sandals.
And they move on their stilts, longing after a forest home, after
low tunnels, after an assigned return to It.

These sections can represent Milosz's work, of course, in only a tiny and fractional way, but I can think of many other poems, hundreds perhaps, that I would have liked to choose to stand for what he has given to us, and it strikes me that so partial and inadequate a representation is inadequate in much the same way as these words of mine are to convey the gratitude and regard that I have felt for Czeslaw as a man and as a poet for four decades. My indebtedness to him is an exemplar of what can be, what is possible. The poetry, the imaginative thought, the example of the insistent union of the imagination, of language, and of conscience. We share many sympathies, some of the same feeling about rivers, and many convictions, such as the one that Czeslaw constantly attributes to Simone Weil—that attention itself is the core of the secret, the endless beginning.

When Czeslaw and Carol came much more recently to visit us on Maui, he was assembling his anthology of luminous things. A few poems of mine found their way into that lovely book, including a poem called "For the Anniversary of my Death." That poem was written shortly before Czeslaw came to visit me in France, and I'm not going to read that one, but one written at about the same time called "Avoiding News by the River." It was the time of the Vietnam War, of the nuclear menace and the human use of poisons for agriculture and killing vegetation and other forms of life, the pollution of all the elements around us except fire, and the accelerating destruction of species and the biosphere, subjects that were barely being considered at that time. It filled me with a pessimism that made the act of writing something that I resorted to only when it became very insistent to me. The poems I wrote then only when they pushed themselves upon me, sometimes in the middle of the night. Sometimes I would get up and walk at night and those of you who have done this in the country, away from human habitation, know that, as the phrase is, you find your way, not by seeing but by the other senses. Dante touched on it in the "Terrace of Anger" in the *Purgatorio*, this seeing that is not seeing. If one believes, as I do, that the phenomenal world itself is a metaphor, the eye taken like this becomes even more remarkable. Sometimes I would walk on the upland at night and sometimes I would walk down by the river, and this poem is about the morning coming down to the river just as the first light comes in, at that historic moment. "Avoiding News by the River." [Reads poem.]

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There are several ways besides Robinson Jeffers's to face how we feel about ourselves and other forms of life, and I want to jump quite a few years to a poem called "Émigré." It's addressed to an émigré, and I had several in mind.

You will find it
much as you imagined
in some respects
which no one can predict
you will be homesick
at times for something you can describe
at times without being able to say
what you miss
just as you used to feel when you were at home

some will complain from the start
that you club together
with your own kind
but only those who have
done what you have done
conceived of it longed for it
lain awake waiting for it
and have come out with
no money no papers nothing
at your age
know what you have done
what you are talking about
and will find you a roof and employers

others will say from the start
that you avoid
those of your country
for a while
as your country becomes
a category in the new place
and nobody remembers the same things
in the same way
and you come to the problem
of what to remember after all
and of what is your real
language
where does it come from what does it
sound like
who speaks it

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if you cling to the old usage
do you not cut yourself off
from the new speech
but if you rush to the new lips
do you not fade like a sound cut off
do you not dry up like a puddle
is the new tongue to be trusted

what of the relics of your childhood
should you bear in mind pieces
of dyed cotton and gnawed wood
lint of voices untranslatable stories
summer sunlight on dried paint
whose color continues to fade in the
growing brightness of the white afternoon
ferns on the shore of the transparent lake
or should you forget them
as you float between ageless languages
and call from one to the other who you are

I want to go to another kind of exile, a poem about a person who was born in Germany in the generation of Ben Jonson and who signed onto a Dutch vessel; he had a good middle-class education, but was not a learned man. He was in effect shanghaied and taken out to the Dutch East Indies, where the European survival rate if they stayed there even for a really short time was down in the teens percentage, but he stayed there for the rest of his life, got out of his uniform, I would think very sensibly, and lived first on Java and then on Ambon, but lived to lose almost everything that he valued. His sense of awe and wonder stayed with him all his life and out of that education he wrote the first five-volume *Flora of the Indies*, first in Latin, and then the first six-volume encyclopedia of the Indies, called *Curiosities of the Indies*, but it was as learned as you could be. This was two hundred years before Linnaeus and the classifications of the Linnaean system. So he had to describe everything, and the descriptions are perfectly wonderful. I mean he reminds me of Montaigne. He's been beautifully translated by E. M. Beekman at Amherst. His name was Georg Edvard Rumph and, if you know anything about tropical botany, you come across his name all the time. The *Flora* that he wrote was lost at sea. The encyclopedia that he wrote was lost in fire. He rewrote them both and illustrated them. He rewrote them the second time in Dutch and they finally survived. But he lost everything else and finally the sight of his eyes and that's the title of the poem, "The Blind Seer of Ambon." You must have guessed that he's a hero of mine, a great figure and a beautiful writer.

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I always knew that I came from
another language

and now even when I can no longer see
I continue to arrive at words

but the leaves
and the shells were already here
and my fingers finding them echo
the untold light and depth

I was betrayed into my true calling
and denied in my advancement
I may have seemed somewhat strange
caring in my own time for living things
with no values that we know
languages wash over them one wave at a time

when the houses fell
in the earthquake
I lost my wife
and my daughter
it all roared and stood still
falling
where they were in the daylight

I named for my wife a flower
as though I could name a flower
my wife dark and luminous
and not there

I lost the drawings of the flowers
in fire
I lost the studies
of the flowers
my first six books in the sea

then I saw that the flowers themselves
were gone
they were indeed gone
I saw
that my wife was gone
then I saw that my daughter was gone
afterward my eyes themselves were gone

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one day I was looking
at infinite small creatures
on the bright sand
and the next day is this
hearing after music
so this is the way I see now

I take a shell in my hand
new to itself and to me
I feel the thinness the warmth and the cold
I listen to the water
which is the story welling up
I remember the colors and their lives
everything takes me by surprise
it is all awake in the darkness

Now, a few poems from *The Vixen*, partly because they're all about the country near Puybrun, near the villages where Czeslaw came to visit me all those years ago and where we really first met. First a poem called "Net" which is about poaching, fishing illegally with a net, something that takes me back quite a few years and, as my friends said, why should we leave fish in the river for the summer people who come down from Paris. "Net."

We were sitting along the river as the daylight
faded in high summer too slowly to be followed
a pink haze gathering beyond the tall poplars
over on the island and late swallows snapping at gnats
from the glassy reaches above the shallows
where feathers of a gray mist were appearing
trout leapt like the slapping of hands behind the low voices
that went on talking of money with the sound of rapids
running through them the boots smelled of former water
the piled nets smelled of the deaths of fish I will know now
how night comes with eyes of its own to a river
and then it was dark and we were seeing by river light
as the oldest got up first taking a coil of rope
down and disappeared into the sound then we
went after him one by one stepping into the cold pull
of the current to feel the round stones slip farther
below us and we uncoiled the nets with the voices
scarcely reaching us over the starlit surface
until we stood each alone hearing only the river
and held the net while the unseen fish brushed past us

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I said that we shared a sympathy for rivers. The next book of poems of mine coming out is called *The River Sound* and it's about the German poet Hölderlin, who in the early nineteenth century left Germany and either lost his passport or didn't have one. He lost his mind as he crossed the Auvergne. He had some kind of traumatic experience and was incoherent most of the time for the rest of his life, but he came down to the Dordogne and then made his way, nobody knows how, to Bordeaux, which was where he was more or less rescued. The poem is called "Hölderlin at the River."

The ice again in my sleep it was following someone
    it thought was me in the dark and I recognized its white tongue
it held me in its freezing radiance until I
    was the only tree there and I broke and carried
my limbs down through dark rocks calling to the summer
    where are you where will you be how could I have missed you
gold skin the still pond shining under the eglantines
    warm peach resting in my palm at noon among flowers
all the way I was looking for you and I had nothing to say who I was
    until the last day of the world then far below I could see
the great valley as night fell the one ray withdrawing
    like the note of a horn and afterwards black wind took
all I knew but here is the foreign morning with its clouds
    sailing on water beyond the black trembling poplars
the sky breathless around its blinding fire and the white flocks
    in water meadows on the far shore are flowing past their
silent shepherds and now only once I hear the hammer
    ring on the anvil and in some place that I have not seen
a bird of ice is singing of its own country
    if any of this remains it will not be me

This is the riskiest part of the reading and I don't know how to do this. I want to read a few sections, each of them about the length of those poems from *The Vixen*, from a narrative poem that's coming out later this year called *The Folding Cliffs*. It's based on a historical occurrence about which I found out everything I could and then made the fiction on the basis of the history, about something that happened in 1891-1893, the time of the piratical takeover of Hawaii by a group of businessmen, with the help of the guns of the *USS Boston*, but the main protagonists are a Hawaiian couple. They're literate but not well educated, certainly not rich or high in the social order. He's a cowboy. She was thought by her village to be very beautiful, and they were sort of a legendary and wonderful couple in their youth. They married

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and had a little boy, who at the time the story opens is about ten years old. This is the time of the first real horrors of leprosy and the attempt to get rid of leprosy, not by curing it but by shoving it under the rug and pushing people where they wouldn't be seen. You may have heard of Father Damian and the leprosarium on Moloka'i. The cowboy is diagnosed by a very ambitious sheriff and is seen to have some of the signs of leprosy on his face and someone comes out and says, "You should go to the doctor." If you were suspected to have leprosy and you were Hawaiian, they sent you off, and this family had decided not to be separated. They also knew that their little boy had leprosy. So instead of going to Kalaupapa and being separated they decided that they would join a band of fugitives in one of the most spectacular valleys on earth. If you can imagine a part of the Grand Canyon that's bright green with waterfalls in it, that would be Kalalau Valley, and that's where they went, and the sheriff worked up for himself the responsibility to go in and clean up the lepers from Kalalau Valley. Ko`olau made it clear that they would not go peacefully and when the sheriff tried to ambush them he shot the sheriff. He never missed, they say, and they sent the army after him. He holed up in the cliffs and, as they appeared, he shot them until they gave up and then he hid somewhere else. So they stayed on. The child died. They buried the child. The husband died finally. She buried him. She lived on in the empty valley for months and then she went back to where she had grown up, and her life afterwards, but the part that I'm going to read is about her going back into the valley. She hears a rumor that Ko`olau's grave has been dug up and that his bones and guns are being sold for souvenirs and she goes back to find out. This is part of that trip.

She was sure now as she lifted the tangle of branches
    guava and then`ohia and kopiko remembering
Kawaluna looking at her steadily each time
    and then shaking her head and saying—You know that nobody
has found him—and yet Pi`ilani had come each time
    to see what she knew the litter of moss and brittle twigs
undisturbed the russet fur along the fern fronds
    untouched the sunlight floating on patches beyond
reach she saw it all in her mind as she came up
    between the rocks and there was no path there were no
footprints or broken shoots and then the hollow in the crag
    and the corner into it and she saw the place before her
almost as she had seen it in her mind only
    a little changed in itself a little estranged
giving off no sign that it knew she was standing there
    the shadows whispering among themselves the cliffs

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with their backs to her the new growth on all sides not
knowing her it was what she had known and been sure of
she stood watching the ragged light scattered across the leaves
tears were running down her face and under her breath
from the center of her body she chanted to the place
Kalua I Ko`olau nobody knows where you are
nobody has found you nobody has found you

Finally, a different kind of water poem called "Waves in August."

There is a war in the distance
with the distance growing smaller
the field glasses lying at hand
are for keeping it far away

I thought I was getting better
about that returning childish
wish to be living somewhere else
that I knew was impossible
and now I find myself wishing
to be here to be alive here
it is impossible enough
to still be the wish of a child

in youth I hid a boat under
the bushes beside the water
knowing I would want it later
and come back and would find it there
someone else took it and left me
instead the sound of the water
with its whisper of vertigo

terror reassurance an old
old sadness it would seem we knew
enough always about parting
but we have to go on learning
as long as there is anything

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UNDERSTANDING "THE WORLD"

John Baarsch: Welcome to the panel on Czeslaw Milosz's poem "The World," written in Warsaw in 1943. This panel brings together three distinguished critics, two of whom are also distinguished poets: **Helen Vendler**, Porter University Professor at Harvard University; **Robert Hass**, a former Poet Laureate of the United States, who teaches at the University of California, Berkeley; and **Robert Pinsky**, the current Poet Laureate of the United States and professor at Boston University. First, Professor Vendler.

Helen Vendler: Thank you, John. Thank you to Robert Faggen for inviting me, to Czeslaw Milosz for writing the poem, and to my fellow panelists who have translated it.

It's 1943, and Warsaw is occupied by the Nazis. Czeslaw Milosz, a poet in his early thirties, seeing his world obliterated, reconstitutes it on the page. "The World": it is a large title for an apparently modest poem, and its subtitle "A Naive Poem" is consciously set before us as though to disarm objection. The ignorantly naive does not call itself naive; this poem, by choosing for itself the simple tones of fairy tales, children's hymns, and primers, demands by its form that we recognize certain inalienable joys and fears inseparable from childhood memory and childhood imagination.

In dreams, even decades after the war, Milosz repeats the loss of his primal world:

> They ordered us to pack our things, as the house was to be burned.
> There was time to write a letter, but that letter was with me
> We laid down our bundles and sat against the wall.
> They looked when we placed a violin on the bundles.
> My little sons did not cry. Gravity and curiosity.
> One of the soldiers brought a can of gasoline. Others were tearing down curtains.

In another nightmare, "In his dreams he is running through a dark garden. / His grandfather is there but the pear tree is not where it should be, / And the little gate opens to a breaking wave."

"The little gate" is the second thing we see in "The World." We have approached it by the road, and through it we reach the porch which leads to the rest of the house, the dining room, and the stairs. Milosz's titles insensibly lead us into the lost world, and the poems introduce us gradually to its few *dramatis personae*—a brother and a sister, Mother and Father. When compared to the rich and particular evocations of Milosz's Lithuanian

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Editor's note: Unfortunately, we were unable to publish Mr. Hass's presentation.

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childhood in *The Issa Valley* and *From the Rising of the Sun*, "The World" reveals its severe rules of form: reduce particulars; delete names; refuse the first person; suppress the sectarian. Nowhere in this poem do we hear of Milosz's aunts or grandparents, his church or its sacraments, his school or his village. We know at most that we are in Poland, and that Warsaw is the nearest city. The family owns books, pictures, and clocks, even a mounted boar's head; and it is a Christian family, because the anonymous speaker groups as a triad the three virtues, faith, hope, and love. The time is vaguely modern, but before World War I: it seems as though house and wood, books and parents, the sun and the virtues, have always existed and always will. When the child is hungry, Mother gives him soup; when he is lost in the wood, Father rescues him; if the night comes, yet the sun returns.

Why would a poet elsewhere so historically circumstantial write such an anonymous poem? "Everything taken away. Crossed out. All our treasures," says Milosz, and he writes "The World" for everyone whose past was obliterated in the War. It is a poem into which any European of Milosz's generation can insert the name of his own birthplace and the rituals of living that he knew as a child, whether in France, in Germany, or in Hungary. Even the virtues are secularized, detached from their doctrinal definitions, so that "The World" aims to be a poem readable by Gentile or Jew. It is in fact readable by anyone who has been a child, since "The World" exerts a heartbreaking power even over those of us who never knew the European world it presents. That power is poetic, historical.

Any person reading "The World," like any person reading Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, has already passed into the world of grim experience. If it were only loss that we felt in encountering the texts of innocence, they would not have such power over us; rather, they remind us that interiorly we continue to feel the expectations and even demands of innocence. All through life, we somehow believe that nourishment, truth, justice, and sustenance should be our portion, and each violation of that belief comes as a fresh shock. We are reminded by songs of innocence of our own persisting innocence, an apparently constitutive element of our being.

As human beings, we wish to share a common being with the world. This, if anything, is the thought unifying Milosz's sequence. "My poem 'The World,'" Milosz has said, ". . .is an attempt to describe the world as it should be, seen by children, as opposed to the world of horror I knew [during the Nazi occupation]." Children, their senses and their minds still fresh, live in a world where visual realities interpenetrate with ethical ones, as the world is humanized for them by their parents.

Though the child in the poem is aware that his world contains dark forces—the mother's shadow struggles with the menacing shadow of the wild boar, and a terrible beast with hot breath lurks in the forest—the threats

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are dispersed, and safety is restored. In a world so constituted, the boar becomes he-who-cannot-frighten-Mother, and the forest beast him-from-whom-I-am-rescued-by-Father. Nothing is a detached sense-experience; in the child's global universe, everything—trees, stories, Mother, Europe, love—is incorporated into the phrase "the world."

Other great poems followed "The World" in Milosz's writing life. But as Milosz moved on, first in the Polish diplomatic service and then, after his break with the regime, to France and to the Slavic Department at Berkeley, his poetry never ceased to hark back to its early pastoral: "Riding in a cart, he looked back to retain as much as possible. / Which means he knew what was needed for some ultimate moment / When he would compose from fragments a world perfect at last."

The dream of restoration enacted in "The World" is both enabled by language and frustrated by it. We are always conscious, in reading this cycle of poems, that an adult is speaking in the style of innocence. Finding that innocent style is itself the act of experience, inventing the art that conceals art, the ultimate in sophistication. George Herbert and William Blake, our English masters of the artless voice, knew what power can be gained by such a strict reining-in of language. Milosz, in turn, repeats his small store of precious words over and over: wood, leaves, color, sky, copper, children, star, path, light, world, dawn, field, window, region, bird, mother, shadow, beast, bark, father, men, earth, steam, towers, cities, forests, blue, house, garden, moon, home, river, flower, gate, people, waves, darkness, sun. These words chime often through the poem, more visibly in the Polish where alliterative sound and line-placement often put them into relief. Though the world represented by these words is as yet a bucolic one, it promises—by the prospective view of Europe offered by the child's father—peaceful and rich cosmopolitan travels to come. Instead, the travels of exile claimed Milosz, and poetry became his way of preserving past space and time. Since he cannot return, he must write: "Never again will I kneel in my small country, by a river, / So that what is stone in me would be dissolved, / So that nothing would remain but my tears, tears." In exile, the poet becomes "a sponge, suffering because it cannot saturate itself; a river, suffering because reflections of clouds and trees are not clouds and trees." Writing is a stylization, a mirror of reality, not reality itself: "And whatever once entered a bolted house of the five senses is now set in the brocade of a style."

And yet, against such observations, Milosz returns stubbornly to a belief in the possible correspondence of language to reality. This belief has for him a grounding in the aesthetics of medieval philosophy: "In 'The World,'" he once said in conversation, "I wanted to write a poetry of scholastic realism"—that doctrine, found especially in Thomas Aquinas, which Umberto Eco calls "an *existential* ontology":

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> *Being* was no longer a mere accidental determination of essence. . .but something which made the essence possible and actual. . . . The bearer of aesthetic value is the concrete organism in all the complexity of its relations. . . . Aquinas held that clarity rises from below, from the heat of things. . . . Physical light is 'a consequence of the substantial form of the sun.'

Against a Platonic affinity for disembodied Forms, scholastic realism saw form as necessarily embodied in existing substance. To medieval scholasticism, the realm of perfect forms is the very world surrounding us, not an abstract World of Forms on another plain. The joyous meeting of mind with form takes place on the human earth. This joy is everywhere in Milosz's cycle.

At the same time, the world is as it is and must be as it is. Even in the perfect being of the scholastic world, the human creature encounters philosophic necessity. Things cannot be other than they are, and if there are to be rocks, they will hurt human feet. The theory of being which is enunciated in Milosz's poems on the three virtues shows being to be external to us, subsisting apart from our perception of it, not framed for our comfort, not anthropocentric. The earth was; it is; it will be. We exist on the earth as trees and flowers do, and all of us, because of the sun, "throw shadows on the earth." The world is substance to our shadow, and the poem "Hope" declares a scholastic faith in the noumenal existence behind phenomena.

In Christian doctrine, faith, hope, and love are called the "theological" virtues because they have to do with the human relation to God (while prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance, the "cardinal" virtues, have to do with relations with other human beings). By secularizing faith, hope, and love into virtues relating human beings to the earth, Milosz substitutes for God the perfect world of his poem. It should be added that the word for "love" in Polish, "miłość," is a homonym for the poet's own name. He must often have meditated on that coincidence; and the extraordinary meaning he arrives at for this third and most important of the virtues demands some explanation: "Love means to learn to look at yourself / The way one looks at distant things / For you are only one thing among many." This is to learn the objectivity essential to the artist, and the sympathy essential to loving one's neighbor. The privilege of the ego is forgone, and with that renunciation the wounds to the ego are healed.

In the Polish original, the second stanza of "Love" rhymes the verb "to use" with the noun "servant": the poet will use things, not for his own ends, but as the servant of the ripeness toward which he and they both tend. Pointed rhymes of this sort and plays on words like the one on world (*świat*) and light (*świalo*) are frequent in Milosz's Polish. Milosz's diction in this

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sequence is drawn in part, it is true, from the realm of children's books; but there are enough literary and philosophical words sprinkled through "The World" that we are always catching a glimpse out of the corner of our eye of the adult writing the sequence. The simple quatrains of most of the poems, we notice, change in the virtue-poems into stanzas more elaborate and irregular, as if to say, "Here, the adult speaks, even if in simple words."

The child's imagination and the poet's imagination fuse in the more fanciful moments of the poem. The child, already a proto-naturalist, imagines that since he has a home, so have all other beings, down to the insects in the peonies. And other things, within his world, may themselves be worlds. Perhaps there is a whole world inside a poppy, complete with a house, a moon, and a chorus of dogs. This vertiginous imagining suggests by extension that somewhere, too, there may be a world much bigger than ours. Just as the dogs inside the poppy-blossom cannot imagine our world, so perhaps we cannot imagine the world two steps up from ours. The birds, one step above us, fly in a "world that is bright, beautiful, warm and free" and have their homes far above our "lake of darkness."

The limitations of our perception, Milosz suggests, coexist with the boundlessness of our imagination. The interpenetrations of different scales, spaces, and times in the poetry become especially strong when the child looks at his picture book, seeing Hector (nameless to the child) dragged around the walls of Troy, while at the same time the child kills a real moth, which "flutters and dies on the hero's body," just as it had flitted over "a chariot." For the child, the world of epic is on the same plane as the moth, and as he turns the page that buries the moth, a new picture makes him re-enter the epic world: "here the sky gets cloudy," as the Greek ships make for home in sight of a naked ploughman on the Trojan shore. And just as the epic moment and the modern moment coexist in the child's percetion, so too do the invisible and the visible: a sunset in the forest appears to the child as an occasion for wizardry, when "an airborne coach carries gifts"—whether for invisible monarchs or the forest bears, it scarcely matters. The lowland lagoon of the Baltic Sea becomes for the child "the golden lowland of the earth" bathing in the sea like "a half-sunken tulip." The boar's head takes on life and its "snout roams the ceiling." We live in the child's world, half-monstrous in its confusion of realms, half-supernatural in its speculations.

"The World" could have been *The Waste Land*. Both spring from the devastation of a world war; but where Eliot shows what is, Milosz shows what-ought-to-be as an "is." And yet Milosz's "*ought-to-be* seen as *is*" does not inhabit the Absolute. To the contrary: it inhabits the actual. This is the import of the unforgettable close of the sequence. After the child's night-terror in the wood, his father brings rescue and the sun: "Here it is still dark. . . . / But the dawn on bright stilts wades in from the shore / And the

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ball of the sun, ringing, rolls." Yet it is not the sun we are to look at; the Absolute would blind us. In his beautiful closing hymn to the sun, Milosz echoes the medieval homage to light, its color and splendor: light, says St. Bonaventure, "is the substantial form of bodies; by their greater or lesser participation in light, bodies acquire the truth and dignity of their being." Whereas the mystic may leave the world behind and gaze at the sun, the poet—or whoever "wants to paint the variegated world"—must find his light in bodies. In the "light reflected by the ground," all losses are restored—the stars and the roses, the dusks and the dawns." After that luminous promise, beneath the last poem of the sequence, Milosz has inscribed a place and time: Warsaw, 1943. The juxtaposition of the poet's promise to the poet's plight stands for the defiance mounted by the poem. Belief meets carnage; faith, hope, and love meet betrayal, despair, and hatred.

In recent years, Milosz has been awarded the Nobel Prize, has seen his work republished in Poland, and has been welcomed back onto Polish soil after years of exile. None of this invalidates the bitterness or the sweetness of "The World." Everything the sequence narrates takes place on this planet perpetually: a child is born, he loves the world, the world is taken away, he poetically reconstitutes the world. What matters is whether the world he writes can tally the world that was:

> If one day our words
> Come so close to the bark of trees in the forest,
> And to orange blossoms, that they become one with them,
> It will mean that we have always defended a great hope.

No poet dares say "I have done it: the real world has entered the word-world." That aim remains "a great hope" guiding the poet's pen. But the reader can say to the poet, as the child's father says to his chosen author, "For ages you will remain perfect / Like your book drawn by thought from nothingness." From nothingness, a book perfect at last. From fragments, a world perfect at last.

In a note to his *Collected Poems*, Milosz quotes a passage from Adam Mickiewicz: "Whoever has not touched the earth will never be in heaven." "The World" is a testimony to that aphorism, and to one of Milosz's own: that the spirit of consciousness "knows the ideal shapes, respects order / In which whatever exists must exist forever." That is why the ultimate rebuke to tyranny is the memory of tranquil existence. Tyrants have their own plans for their victims:

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They tied the hands of man with barbed wire.
And dug shallow graves at the edge of the wood.
There would be no truth in his last testament.
They wanted him anonymous for good.

Against that anonymity of the mass graves of World War II stands "The World." It too is "anonymous for good," but with the anonymity of art. "What power," Milosz asks, "can restore life to shadows?" He adds that "whatever is restored to brilliance becomes, so to speak, a moment torn from the throat of motion, a testament to the durability of even the most ephemeral instant." In Milosz's sequence, the child of Europe lives again, and his resurrected pre-war world glistens in its twenty pure manifestations. Framed in ashes, it shines in the reflected sunlight of language. Charmed by its invitation, we step into it again: "There, where you see a green valley. . . ."

Robert Pinsky: I have very little to add to Helen Vendler's demonstration of this great work's humanity and penetration and Robert Hass's demonstration of its originality and complexity. But I have two ideas. One is about translation and the other about the poem "The World."

The idea about translation, based on the famous essay by Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," is that this poem by Czeslaw Milosz is the best translation that will ever be made of a mysterious original in the mind of God written in the language from before the Tower of Babel. No translation can ever approach the accuracy and brilliance of Milosz's translation of that ineffable, mysterious, and complex original. However, the Japanese, Swedish, Korean, Italian, and English translations—if they are strong—register the impact of "The World" upon each new language. According to Benjamin's theory, those translations have triangulated a bit, have moved somewhat to the side, and thus give a little more information that even the great translation cannot give about that original in the mind of God.

This is one of the justifications for what has been called the impossible act of translation. To use a language I know somewhat, *pane* is not *bread*. If you want that substance you can get it by saying *pane* or *bread*; but in a poem, *pane* is not *bread*. In Italian they don't say, as good as gold. They say, as good as bread. *Pane* is a Latinate word in a Romance language primarily and almost exclusively made of Latinate words. *Bread* is a Germanic root in a language that is very sensitive to the difference between Romance or Latinate roots and Germanic roots.

Enacted theoretically and in a very precise way, translation is impossible, but in another way it can contribute to an understanding of the work, the way an essay of literary criticism might do. What Benjamin calls a "strong

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translation" is like an essay. It's a reading; and indeed, as we know from the great scholars of the Middle Ages, translation is a high form of reading.

I'll present my idea about the poem "The World" to you by citing another of the very few works of twentieth-century poetry in any language that survive comparison with "The World." Yeats writes:

> Turning and turning in the widening gyre
> The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
> Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
> The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
> The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
> The best lack all conviction, while the worst
> Are full of passionate intensity.

(I am aware that you might joke to yourself; yes, it is funny to think of the phrase as meaning literary criticism, "Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.") "The ceremony of innocence" seems to me one way to approach the subject of this work. It's about the relationship between ceremony, which is presented in the poem partly by the pedagogical ceremony of teaching children to read and teaching them precepts in rhyme—rhyme is itself a kind of ceremony—and innocence. The relationship between ceremony and innocence seems to me a deep part of this poem. I associate it with an image I always use as a key to understanding Czeslaw's work. It's the image in *Native Realm* of the great train station at a time of war, full of angry, dislocated, disorganized, unhappy, threatened, avaricious humanity, and in the middle of the station a family whose mother has prepared tea is sitting on the floor. And with all the courteous, domestic gestures of ceremony, the family is having tea. What is ceremony? It is not ritual. In this context I think that ceremony is a means of relating a microcosm and a macrocosm. In my little world, someone has died. Or two people are getting married, or a child is born, or someone is retiring. Something has happened in the little world, and to relate it to the larger world I make a speech or sing a song or produce certain objects. The pathos of an entire continent or perhaps the entire world is related, as Helen and Bob have described, in the microcosm of the family as perceived by the children.

Innocence deprived of ceremony degenerates into brutality. Without ceremony, innocence becomes brutal. Ceremony without innocence becomes cynical, desperate, and despairing: that is the narrative of the poem. I'll just account for that narrative in three poems: one from near the beginning of the work, "Pictures," one from the middle, and the end

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of the work that Helen has already described rather eloquently. "Pictures."

> An open book. A brown moth flutters and swoops
> Above the dust-cloud where a chariot hurtles.
> Touched, the moth falls as its golden powder settles
> Over the ranks of conquering Greek troops.
>
> The chariot rolls over, and Hector's head
> Bumps on the cobbles, dragged behind his horses.
> The moth, pinned among the turning pages,
> Flutters on the hero's body, then is dead.
>
> Meanwhile, clouds darken; thunder booms alarm;
> Ships dash from the jagged cliffs to safer harbor;
> Nearby, his oxen grunting at their steady labor,
> A naked plowman works a hillside farm.

Bob's account of this poem as ending with a kind of a glance at the economic reality behind "The World" seems to me quite appropriate. That reality could be said to resolve the conflict or dance in the poem, the perspective between the epic world of the *Iliad*, and perhaps of the war outside. "Ships dash from the jagged cliffs to safer harbor" could be the *Iliad*, or it could be Europe and the little world of the moth dying. What could be more microcosmic? In the little world of my copy of the *Iliad,* in the tiny scale of my imagination, the brutality of Achilles and Achilles' defiance of ritual and decorum and decency as he mutilates and desecrates the body of his enemy is contained inside the decorum of my picture-book, and perhaps in the peace of my study, or perhaps within the eloquence of the essay I write about the *Iliad*. Ultimately the atmosphere of the study is perhaps acceded to in the *Iliad* when Achilles accedes to ceremony. That is an innocent, perhaps naive encounter, the little world of the moth dying on the page where the hero is, but it recalls both works of art and the larger brutalities that Homer depicts in the *Iliad*.

Now another poem, "The Bird Kingdom." Sometimes when you're flailing about in translation, you think there's an ingredient from an aesthetic bottle you could just pour out of, and the bottle that, perhaps mistakenly, came to mind was labeled "Roethke"—"Maybe we should just pour some Roethke over this one." "The Bird Kingdom." [Reads poem.] It seems to me if you think of "The World" as having a kind of course, a graph, the relationship of the microcosm and macrocosm may be equal to that of the relationship between the bird world and the

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world of the child that feels a feather brush its face. Now I'll read "The Sun."

> All colors are made of Sun and the Sun contains them all.
> So the source of color, the Sun, itself has no one color.
> But the various Earth is like a single poem or picture
> With Sun the emblem of the artist of the whole.
>
> And anyone who wants to take his brush and try
> To paint the Earth must not look straight up at the Sun
> Or he will lose the memory of all he's ever seen,
> With only a burning tear to fill his eye.
>
> Let him kneel down and press his cheek in grass and then
> Look till he sees the beam the Earth reflects back upwards.
> There he will find all of our lost, forgotten treasures:
> Stars and Roses, the setting and the rising Sun.

It seems to me that it's a very peculiar gesture, the gesture of kneeling down and peering into the grass and trying to see the colors of the grass, the soil, the weeds, perhaps an insect, to see it all as basically solar energy, the sun bouncing back up off the earth. It is such a peculiar gesture that it fails for me as a naturalistic, "real" action. But it doesn't fail as a gesture. It's a brilliant image, and we cannot put it either into the category of ceremony or of innocence. It's too pointed and quasi-scientific. It's a gesture neither of ceremony nor of innocence, but some other area where translation fails. It is willed, inventive, guided by intelligence, surprising, full of discovery. In short it represents the missing link that binds together the problem of translation and the relationship between innocence on the one hand and ceremony on the other. It is a gesture, at the very end of the poem, of art. The very artificiality of the gesture is its point: art mediates between innocence and ceremony. That act of kneeling down and looking and thinking a certain way is like the author's face appearing at the very end, after having been repressed; or like an acknowledgment, as Helen says, in the great art it takes to write a naive poem. The last gesture of the poem to me says that there's ceremony, and there is innocence, and there is art that strives to bring them together. I have tried, says the poet of "The World," to bring them together for you in the presence of despair and in the face, perhaps, of the end of the world. This, he says, is my gesture of art.

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ROBERT PINSKY

Ryan Winters: **Robert Pinsky** teaches in the Creative Writing Program at Boston University. He is the author of five books of poetry, has translated *The Inferno* of Dante and *The Separate Notebooks* of Milosz, as well as many other poems by Milosz, and has written influential books of criticism. I introduce to you the Poet Laureate of the United States, Robert Pinsky.

Robert Pinsky: It is an honor to read to you at a conference devoted to the works of Czeslaw Milosz. It almost seems an invitation to catastrophe. Two poems by Czeslaw that are particularly close to me I put into my own book. One is "Incantation." The other is "Song on Porcelain"—this version is slightly more free than my version as printed in Milosz's books.

(Czeslaw Milosz, after World War II)

Rose colored cup and saucer,
Flowery demitasses;
They lie beside the river
Where an armored column passes.
Winds from across the meadow
Sprinkle the banks with down;
A torn apple tree's shadow
Falls on the muddy path;
The ground everywhere is strewn
With bits of brittle froth—
Of all things broken and lost
The porcelain troubles me most. [. . .]

The porcelain in the poem is an image of lost Europe, as it thought it was, or as it believed itself to be—its elegant manners, its art, its way of life. Porcelain was a mania. Emperors collected it. It represents refinement, and a Europe that tried to destroy itself. They were all Europeans after all. It isn't as though Africans or Asians or South Americans went there and perpetrated a war or a holocaust. The porcelain is most disturbing, because it suggests that what is lost is the same thing as the destruction, as though Europe tore at itself, bit wounds into itself, and put itself in concentration camps. And that disparity between historical ideal and historical reality is what troubles the person who walks along the banks of the river.

When we're reading Joyce we feel how Joycean we are, and when we read Shakespeare we all tend to feel, "I'm really like Shakespeare," although next week, we'll be Gogol or Dostoyevsky. Another of Milosz's poems related to this notion is "Bypassing Rue Descartes."

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Bypassing rue Descartes
I descended toward the Seine, shy, a traveler,
A young barbarian just come to the capital of the world.

We were many, from Jassy and Koloshvar, Wilno and Bucharest,
Saigon and Marrakesh,
Ashamed to remember the customs of our homes,
About which nobody here should ever be told:
The clapping for servants, barefooted girls hurry in,
Dividing food with incantations,
Choral prayers recited by master and household together.

I left the cloudy provinces behind,
I entered the universal, dazzled and desiring.

Soon enough, many from Jassy and Koloshvar, or Saigon and Marrakesh
Would be killed because they wanted to abolish the customs of
their homes.

Soon enough, their peers were seizing power
In order to kill in the name of the universal, beautiful ideas.

Meanwhile the city behaved in accordance with its nature,
Rustling with dreary laughter in the dark,
Baking long breads and pouring wine into clay pitchers,
Buying fish, lemons, and garlic at street markets,
Indifferent as to honor and shame and greatness and glory,
Because that had been done already and had transformed itself

Into moments representing nobody knows whom,
Into arias hardly audible and into turns of speech.

Again I lean on the rough granite of the embankment,
As if I had returned from travels through the underworlds
And suddenly saw in the light the reeling wheel of the seasons
Where empires have fallen and those once living are now dead.

There is no capital of the world, neither here nor anywhere else,
And the abolished customs are restored to their small fame
And now I know that the time of human generations is not like the
time of the earth.

As to my heavy sins, I remember one most vividly:
How, one day, walking on a forest path along a stream,
I pushed a rock down onto a water snake coiled in the grass.

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> And what I have met with in life was the just punishment
> Which reaches, sooner or later, the breaker of a taboo.

One's sense of civilization doubtless is enhanced by having a dashing uncle, who is a famous French poet and a diplomat, and who shows you Paris from the inside. But for Czeslaw it was a stroke of luck to have Wilno as well. It was a cosmopolitan city and an intelligent, alert person could not grow up there without a sense of many cultures. There was a fruitful cultural collision and blending and exchanging between Lithuanians and Jews. Wilno was a good place from which to stand to behold the universe.

But that Wilno is gone. Wilno just popped into a recent poem of mine—part of my ongoing effort to see the United States and our artifacts and my life among them as historically as Eastern Europe or Florence. For the shopping mall is as historical as Prague or Florence; it is equally the outcome of thousands of years of human history, and, if we cannot detect that, it's due to deficiencies in our equipment of perception. Perhaps like Czeslaw, I sense that everything in our world is a haunted ruin. The notion behind this poem is that our bodies are haunted by all those unknown and known ancestors, as is our language and our culture. And each thing is a ruin, because a lot of it is unretrievable. In a sense a new car or microphone, if you could understand it, is as much a haunted ruin as what looks like a haunted ruin.

> Even your computer is a haunted ruin, as your
> Blood leaves something of itself, warming
> The tool in your hand.
>
> From far off, down the billion corridors
> Of the semiconductor, military
> Pipes grieve at the junctures.
>
> This too smells of the body, its heated
> Polymers smell of breast milk
> And worry-sweat.
>
> Hum of so many cycles in current, voltage
> Of the past. Sing, wires. Feel, hand. Eyes,
> Watch and form
>
> Legs and bellies of characters:
> Beak and eye of A. Serpentine hiss
> S of the foregoers, claw-tines.

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Of E and of the claw hammer
You bought yesterday, its head
Tasting of light oil, the juice

Of dead striving—the haft
Of ash, for all its urethane varnish, is
Polished by body salts.

Pull, clawhead. Hold, shaft. Steel face,
Strike and relieve me. Voice
Of the maker locked in the baritone

Whine of the handsaw working.
Lost, lingerer like the dead souls of
Vilna, revenant. Machine-soul.

Here's another Milosz poem. "My Faithful Mother Tongue."

Faithful mother tongue,
I have been serving you.
Every night, I used to set before you little bowls of colors
so you could have your birch, your cricket, your finch
as preserved in my memory.

This lasted many years.
You were my native land; I lacked any other.
I believed that you would also be a messenger
between me and some good people
even if they were few, twenty, ten
or not born, as yet.

Now, I confess my doubt.
There are moments when it seems to me I have squandered my life.
For you are a tongue of the debased,
of the unreasonable, hating themselves. [. . .]
. . . . . .

Faithful mother tongue,
perhaps after all it's I who must try to save you.
So I will continue to set before you little bowls of colors
bright and pure if possible,
for what is needed in misfortune is a little order and beauty.

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In one of my poems I steal a bit from that poem, and I'll read it to you. I play poker twice a month, mostly with doctors and lawyers.The nicest man among us, Bernie Fields, got pancreatic cancer, which is virtually always fatal. Bernie actually beat it with a very drastic operation called the Whipple and lived for two or three years. Then he died. He was a very famous virologist who at one point was offered a job as national director of AIDS research. I got the idea to write a letter from Bernie to me, from the other side: at the beginning of the poem he's trying to use the manners of the living; he salutes me as "Dear Robert." But as the poem progresses, the manners of the dead take over and he sort of fades away. "The Ice-Storm": *In memory of Bernie Fields.*

Dear Robert, Thank you for trying to rig
A conduit for me—linkage, blank, bandage, this
Contraption made of grammar, with "I" for "he":

Words are no clumsier than what we use to trace
Tangled up branches on the family tree
Of some culprit virus stowed in its rootclot.

Voice not you nor I, I not what I was or am,
You not what you are or were—poker crony,
Acquaintance, seeking what germ strewn in the sodcloud?

Flailing for instructive failure. "*That's life.*"
Muttered—not an adage and not an answer
To *What is life?* (Not my field, though nearly.)

What is a life?: that is the better question,
As I'd have said even before the cancer
Churned me across dark water to this other side:

No opalescent temple, no sages fringed and sidelocked,
No smoking field where a hero craves a cottage.
No void no terraces no planisphere. Nothing you know.

The day that Leslie read those poems to me
He wasn't sure I was listening, dark shape
Unspeaking swollen on the pillows. Tell him I was

What is a life? A specimen, or a kind?
A savage craving or civil obituary
Architecture of birth, attachment, achievement?—

The *Times* rehearsing with mediated, Roman
Sweetness the names of my dear kin, so cherished
In the molten hold of attachment, sweet cooling lava;

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Or honey of ink aggrandizing, gratifying
(". . .one of the great virologists of the century"),
Meaning: a success, like everybody else.

When you hear the *Yisgadal v'yiskadash sh'may rabath*
When the beloved one hurling her handful of earth
Staggers at the brink as if buffeted by wind

When the congregation responds *Y'hay sh-may*
Rabah m'varah, l'olam ul-ol-may ol maya—it's
Now my mouth is the flared bell of a silver horn

Now my eyes lidded by the wings of a dragonfly look
Inward for billions of miles, Now my feet are two
Crystals that leave no prints. O the poker game!

Closed system, boyish ritual first Sunday evening
Of the month, more innocent than boyish, none smoking, few
Cursing, never more than a second beer, game, lightness.

Wanting deeply to win, and that wanting what we play
To laugh at, stakes high enough to terrify our
Selves at fourteen, low enough to parody that fear.

My brain a clay vessel my fingers unlit candles
My lights a cello, cabalistic rhythms of Spade
Heart Club Diamond royalty in Gypsy embroidery.

Permission, remission, the Washington AIDS job
My doctors said was too great a risk for me. Now
My heart is fluted amber, umbrage of texts, When

Thou cut down thy harvest in the field, and hast forgot
A sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to
Fetch it, for it will be for the stranger,

The fatherless and the widow, Remember thou
Lived a bondsman in the land of Egypt. *Yisgadal*
V'yiskadash trembling life, crystal or viral,

Lifespan of the ice-storm the week after I died
That lasted for three days: separate lucid twigs
Still coated with chrism each morning, gutters

Still filigreed with leaf-ice, diamonded branches
Bowed heavy with light, at dusk still rosy,
Mysterious light melted to a sheen by morning

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CZESLAW MILOSZ

Robert Faggen: Now we're at the finale of what has been one of the most joyous three-and-a-half-day periods of my life, the International Milosz Festival. **Robert Pinsky** will introduce **Mr. Czeslaw Milosz**.

Robert Pinsky: In the unforeseeable, peculiar and glorious career of Czeslaw Milosz one of the many wonders is the fact that he has become, for young poets in our country, an essential American poet—perhaps even the most important living American poet. When I ask the poets in their twenties who study with me to make anthologies of the poetry that means most to them, no author's name appears more often than his—a name many of them revere despite the difficulty they have pronouncing it. When I ask them to choose a poem to learn by heart, it is often a poem by Czeslaw Milosz, in translation. This is a profoundly significant form of laurel as well as a strange one, a transplant that has reached across languages, cultures, decades, vastly different colors and epochs of experience.

Prizes, in and of themselves, are baloney. No award committee, indeed no critic, no curriculum, can ensure the long-term life of the art they elevate to wide notice. The work of an artist ultimately survives or not, depending on what that work means to artists who come afterwards. What will they hunger for, to feed their own art? Such hunger, in the long run, is a compass or indicator as accurate as the gesture of plants turning toward the sun.

This phenomenon—the importance of an Eastern European poet, and a poet who writes in a language never associated with great political, economic, or military power, for American poets younger than himself—has its own history. Intense engagement with Czeslaw Milosz's poetry could be observed among young American poets before the 1980 Nobel Prize, before the days of Solidarity in Poland, before lines of Milosz's were inscribed on a monument in Gdansk, before he was celebrated in a country where publication of his work and mention of his name were once forbidden.

We can speculate that for Polish poets who began learning their craft in the 1960s—the generation of Adam Zagajewski and Stanislaw Baranczak—Milosz was an attractive figure first because he was forbidden by the regime, and then because, along with his brilliance as a writer and his freedom from the moral compromises of the Soviet era, Milosz represented certain values: the then-secret trove of the Polish and European past, and the tantalizing, then-precluded trove of the West. But what made American poets esteem the work of Milosz as central, even before his official ennoblement in 1980? Why did the original *Selected Poems* of 1973 and *Bells in Winter* in 1978 make such a distinct impression upon poets of my generation? I well remember how many of us were discussing *Bells in Winter,* translated by Lillian Vallee and published by the Ecco Press in its

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distinctive black and silver cover with burgundy lettering. Before he was a world figure, Milosz was a vital figure for American poets. Why?

One answer goes like this: poets have found in this body of work a human response to history, and history dealt with neither as a picture-book for ideology (in the old style of determinism) nor as a proving-ground for ironic skepticisms (in the current style of determinism). Rather, the poems of Milosz seem to offer an intellectual and emotional response to historical reality that is grounded somehow in the precious center of life; history, not as the past nor as ingenious academic theories about the past, but as the reality that inheres in the shape of a plant, in the gestures of a family having tea in the midst of a great infernal train station, in the terrifying war for which the train station itself is a blunted metonymy. This underlying historical reality, equally immanent in that year of the wartime railway terminal and in this moment, to learn the art of perceiving this reality—that is part of why young poets read Milosz.

The invaluable mystery that aspiring poets seek in Milosz's work is simply a form of attention: the ability to surprise, yet to surprise with what turns out to make emotional sense. When they turn to him for conscience, he is concentrating on the smell of a gillyflower, the mind of Linnaeus, the quality of being. This, too, is historical, perhaps related to the advantage of hailing from the cosmopolitan province of Wilno, his home city, where streams of Polish, Lithuanian, liturgical Latin, and the learned Jewish disputations of the "Jerusalem of the North" all poured into his soul—a soul which, in his poem *"Esse,"* Milosz compares to "A sponge, suffering because it cannot saturate itself; a river, suffering because reflections of clouds and trees are not clouds and trees."

That philosophical meditation on the sheer being of a specific face, a stranger in the Metro, is as much a tribute to concrete reality as "Incantation," another poem I love, is a tribute to the reality of ideas. Imagine having the nerve to begin a poem as this one begins: "Human reason is beautiful and invincible. . . ." Seamus Heaney has asked how in the world this poem manages to work; as Heaney correctly suggests, the answer is somewhere in the quality of conviction, a quality that depends upon experience, which is to say, a history. Just as reflections of clouds and trees in the mind are not clouds and trees, in the converse, chimerical ideologies—racism, determinism—that have underpinned the practice of twentieth-century totalitarianism are not ideas, "Incantation" maintains. What might be called the idolatries of ideology are not ideas. Conviction underlies the poetic accomplishment that can present such focused works as these two lyrics.

Working with Mr. Milosz on the English approximation of such works has been in one way a special privilege I treasure, a stroke of individual

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luck; but in another way, it is a kind of apprenticeship that I share with many poets all over the world, and certainly in this country.

Ladies and gentlemen, Czeslaw Milosz.

Czeslaw Milosz: With a kind of awe have I been the object of this festival. But I can assure you all that I fully understand its importance not only for me but for poetry and the co-operation of American and European poets. Most of all, for me it was a feast of friendship, so I want to tell you something about my friends who gathered here. I begin with Professor Robert Faggen, whose love of poetry and excellent knowledge of modern poetry first brought me to Claremont-McKenna College. I have been invited by him here twice, and have had the chance to test his students, both here and in Berkeley; I have discovered that these students have an excellent understanding of poetry, are very sophisticated, and share a love of poetry with Bob Faggen. So Professor Faggen really started this project before the idea of this conference was born. The second friend is Adam Michnik, with whom we drank a lot of wine and vodka in Warsaw. These two had the idea of this festival, which has brought together my friends, poets, and critics from America and Poland. So I had a strange feeling: only in the most optimistic dreams can you have such an experience of kindness and warmth among people of two languages. I want to thank all of my friends who gathered here, and all who attended this festival. Perhaps I should say that the list of those who made it financially possible is long. I cannot enumerate them all, but I would especially like to thank Mrs. Drue Heinz and the Lannan Foundation.

Now a few personal observations. Perhaps I would prefer to be judged by my poems only. My fate however was to appear successively as a poet, an author of political treatises, a translator, an escapee from political systems, and an immigrant. Furthermore, I practice many literary genres, so that an undeniably unitary striving underlying my various books is not always clear, even to myself. For a long time, I was known in the West only as the author of *The Captive Mind* and considered a political writer. My poetry was not translated. In turn, thanks to translators, I became known in America as a poet and as my dear friend Pinsky said, especially to young American poets. Other fields of my activity remained rather opaque to American readers. Thus my translations from the Bible into Polish, certainly a rather strange occupation for an inhabitant of Berkeley, belong to a domain inaccessible to my American friends (Polish translations of the Bible go back to the fifteenth century). The fact that my poems in translation have found American readers and listeners for me is almost a miracle. I consider it a rare privilege.

The venture of translating my poetry into English was unexpected and continues to astonish me. Usually the translator struggles solitarily

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with a foreign language, a foreign language text, trying to transfer it into his native tongue. In my case, it has been the common effort of author and translator: thus, teamwork. At first I applied that method to translating other Polish poets, and together with Peter Dale Scott published a volume of Zbigniew Herbert's poetry and an anthology of post-war Polish poetry. Next I turned to my own poems. Most of my poetry's translators take part in this festival and I pay them a well-earned homage for their many hours spent patiently looking for the proper word. In the beginning my students, Lillian Vallee and Richard Lourie, who fortunately for me knew the language of the originals, toiled at this task with me. Then, two Berkeley poets, Robert Pinsky and Robert Hass, who do not know Polish, formed a team with Renata Gorczynski, who provided them with English versions. The composition of the team changed, and Robert Hass and I have been engaged in the task since then. Similarly, as a team, I worked with Leonard Nathan translating some of my poems, as well as those by Aleksander Wat and Anna Swir (Swirszczynska). This adventure, which would have bypassed me had I not emigrated to America, for me has been proof that what you said about openness to foreigners, to other languages, and to other ideas, is an essential feature of this country. Furthermore, my personal experience is associated in my mind with many similar events which signify a new face in the life of America as a country of poetry, something nobody suspected in the beginning of this century.

I have witnessed the changing place of poetry on this continent, and that witnessing was especially close, as my late friend, Joseph Brodsky, along with Robert Hass and Robert Pinsky, were and are significant promoters of poetry for all. They strive to enlarge the circle of readers, and this at the present moment has a particular importance, as poetry by its very nature resists the spiritual devastation induced by the mass media. Thank you—that's all I have to say.

Now, I'm going to read some poems which have a slight autobiographical quality. I begin with a poem entitled "Capri."

> I am a child who receives First Communion in Wilno and afterwards drinks cocoa served by zealous Catholic ladies.
>
> I am an old man who remembers that day in June: the ecstasy of the sinless, white tablecloth and the sun on vases filled with peonies.
>
> *Qu'as tu fait, qu'as tu fait de ta vie?*—voices call, in various languages gathered in your wanderings through two continents. What did you do with your life, what did you do?

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Slowly, cautiously, now when destiny is fulfilled I enter the scenes of the bygone time,

Of my century, in which, and not in any other, I was ordered to be born, to work, and to leave a trace.

Those Catholic ladies existed, after all, and if I returned there now, identical but with another consciousness, I would look intensely at their faces, trying to prevent their fading away.

Also, carriages and rumps of horses illuminated by lightning or by the pulsating flow of distant artillery.

Chimneyless huts, smoke billowing on their roofs, and wide sandy roads in pine forests.

Countries and cities that must remain without name, for how can I explain why and how many times they changed their banners and emblems?

Early we receive a call, yet it remains incomprehensible, and only late do we discover how obedient we were.

The river rolls its waters past, as it did long ago, the church of St. Jacob, I am there together with my foolishness, which is shameful, but had I been wiser it would not have helped.

Now I know foolishness is necessary in all our designs, so that they are realized, awkwardly and incompletely.

And this river, together with heaps of garbage on its banks, with the beginning of pollution, flows through my youth, a warning against the longing for ideal places on the earth.

Yet, there, on that river, I experienced full happiness, a ravishment beyond any thought or concern, still lasting in my body.

Just like the happiness by the small river of my childhood, in a park whose oaks and lindens were to be cut down by the will of barbarous conquerors.

I bless you, rivers, I pronounce your names in the way my mother pronounced them, with respect yet tenderly.

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Who will dare to say: I was called and that's the reason Might protected me from bullets ripping up the sand close by me, or drawing patterns on the wall above my head.

From a casual arrest just for elucidating the case, which would end with a journey in a freight car to a place from which the living do not return?

From obeying the order to register, when only the disobedient would survive?

Yes, but what about them, has not everyone of them prayed to his God, begging: Save me!

And the sun was rising over camps of torture and even now with their eyes I see it rising.

I reach eighty, I fly from San Francisco to Frankfurt and Rome, a passenger who once traveled three days by horse carriage from Szetejnie to Wilno.

I fly Lufthansa, how nice that stewardess is, all of them are so civilized that it would be tactless to remember who they were.

On Capri a rejoicing and banqueting humanity invites me to take part in the festivity of incessant renewal.

Naked arms of women, a hand driving a bow across the strings, among evening gowns, glares and flashes open me for a moment of assent to the frivolity of our species.

They do not need a belief in Heaven and Hell, labyrinths of philosophy, mortification of the flesh by fasting.

And yet they are afraid of a sign that the unavoidable is close: a tumor in the breast, blood in the urine, high blood pressure.

Then they know for certain that all of us are called, and each of us meditates on the extravagance of having a separate fate.

Together with my epoch I go away, prepared for a verdict, that will count me among its phantoms.

If I accomplished anything, it was only when I, a pious boy, chased after the disguises of the lost Reality.

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After the real presence of divinity in our flesh and blood which
are at the same time bread and wine,

Hearing the immense call of the Particular, despite the earthly law
that sentences memory to extinction.

In this conference, I heard many problems discussed, but I suspect that one was not discussed enough: suffering. This is also autobiographical, about my childhood and youth and so on. [Reads, among others, his poems "The Thistle, the Nettle," "Rivers," and "Pure Beauty: A Benediction."]

The following is not autobiographical; it's an autobiography of our century. I would like to read poems only in English, but I also want to read a few short poems which have never been translated into English; that is why I have to read them in Polish. This is a pastoral song, written a long time ago under the German occupation and with the same aim more or less as "The World." [Reads in Polish.] And here is a poem written not long ago. Of course, absolutely untranslatable. [Reads in Polish.]

I am going to end now by reading "A Song On the End of the World"—it too was written during the war, under the Nazi occupation.

On the day the world ends
A bee circles a clover,
A fisherman mends a glimmering net.
Happy porpoises jump in the sea,
By the rainspout young sparrows are playing
And the snake is gold-skinned as it should always be.

On the day the world ends
Women walk through the fields under their umbrellas,
A drunkard grows sleepy at the edge of a lawn,
Vegetable peddlers shout in the street
And a yellow-sailed boat comes nearer the island,
The voice of a violin lasts in the air
And leads into a starry night.

And those who expected lightning and thunder
Are disappointed.
And those who expected signs and archangels' trumps
Do not believe it is happening now.
As long as the sun and moon are above,
As long as the bumblebee visits a rose,

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As long as rosy infants are born
No one believes it is happening now.

Only a white-haired old man, who would be a prophet
Yet is not a prophet, for he's much too busy,
Repeats while he binds his tomatoes:
There will be no other end of the world,
There will be no other end of the world.

Thank you.

Czeslaw Milosz on Tape

Listeners to this 1974 recording will discover a rich and broad selection from thirty years of the poet's work. Milosz reads from the widely celebrated *Collected Poems.* Some poems are read in the original Polish. Introduced by Michael Benedikt. 60 minutes.

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EDITH KURZWEIL

Impressions of the 36th New York Film Festival

On balance, this year's crop of films chosen for the New York Film Festival included fewer productions dealing with ghastly crime and gory violence than last year's, and those that did, for the most part, ended up having the lawbreakers pay up and the audience concluding that ultimately criminals will die or land behind bars. With minor exceptions, the actors and the photography were superb and thereby tended to redeem and make believable even the most outlandish, entertaining tales. Among these, I would award first place to *Black Cat, White Cat*, a crazy, jubilant fable set in a backward region of Yugoslavia, played mostly by non-professional gypsy actors who cavort on the shores of the Danube and in the nearby woods.

Altogether, the directors focused on their stories, and the best of these were full of surprises and ambiguities. References to literature abounded, if not in the films themselves, then in the press conferences. For instance, two stories by Pirandello (the first one about a man who can't stop laughing, set in fascist Italy in the 1930s, and the second one about two kidnappings—in the distant past and in the 1980s) were the explicit take-offs for the Italian film *Tu ridi*; Oscar Wilde inspired *Velvet Goldmine;* an old Austrian folk tale was adapted in *The Inheritors*; and movie clips of *Frankenstein* were shown in *Gods and Monsters*—a take-off from the book about the director of *The Bride of Frankenstein*, James Whale (Ian McKellen), who ended his life as a melancholy recluse. This story revolves around his fantasies about, and subtle propositions to, his handsome pool boy (Brendan Fraser)—including a scene of naked young men cavorting around that pool—which allegedly induced the director to commit suicide.

As we know, art films are as much entertainment as art, if only because, in order to be distributed and shown, they need commercial backers. Thus they play to the *Zeitgeist*, no matter how much their producers claim to be at the cutting edge of the *avant-garde* (whatever and wherever that may be). Moreover, since movie-making itself has become a glamorous profession, the buzz at the press showings is about directors, producers, and actors, their track records and potentials; about finances, distributors, and deals. Thus one overhears disparaging comments that rarely hit the reviews, questions about why one film or another was chosen to be included in the first place,

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and about how and why it (and its cast and crew) received prizes at the Cannes festival. All of that enhances the reputation of directors, so we shouldn't be too surprised that more and more movies are made about them. After all, film studies now is among the most popular majors on campuses around the country, and professors of film teach just how the great and famous directors, such as Bergman, Fellini, and Truffault, looked into the mirrors of their cameras. The best of these students may even be among those whose short films (from four to fourteen minutes) were shown before the main spectacles; and another fourteen shorts made up two sessions.

Some of these "Views from the Avant-Garde" last up to thirty minutes, tend to focus on inner emotions, and try to evoke the viewers' associations rather than spell out the director's intent. Some are in black-and-white, in fleeting, vague images that barely sink in—and that may or may not be interspersed with sharp ones. Others elicit laughter, such as the one featuring Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney in a dance of spastic—yet seamless—motions, as if they were caused by a broken record. Yet others linger in my mind due to their glorious colors, mostly found in blooming flowers, glistening surfaces of a sunlit lake, or in the colors of a fall landscape—which often change with the onset of a storm or the movement of clouds. Memories of water—dripping or gurgling, still or agitated, transparent or dense, from above or below the water level, against a car's windshield or a window pane, and all of it in a fixed frame—demonstrate, without getting kitschy, how the camera is able to call attention to spectacles in our backyards we never notice. All of these films almost exclusively rely on visual effects. For the most part, the stunning images enhance rather than shock our sensibilities. This often is done by unexpected sounds. The directors show off what the manipulation of new technologies can achieve by the use of imagination. Whether or not this heralds another break in tradition, which may be a return to previous mores as well, remains to be seen.

Not surprisingly, Ingmar Bergman's last work, *In the Presence of a Clown*, was fêted, since he is one of the most renowned filmmakers of our time. It is a story about a mental patient who claims to have invented cinematic art, the talking picture, and who after his release sets out to make a movie together with another mental patient—in his native village. The event turns into a fiasco when the theater is almost burned down due to an electrical explosion, but it is saved by the actors, who improvise a staged reading by candlelight. Altogether, Schubert's music and the arresting photography dominate this moody, dark film, which is a made-for-television movie that will air next year. It rides on Bergman's reputation and on what we read into it rather than on its intrinsic merits.

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If notions of what passes as multiculturalism were not playing such a dominant role in our culture, I doubt that we would have been handed a separate "list of languages"—Farsi, Serbo-Croatian, Danish, Japanese, French, Mandarin, German, Russian, Bambara (I gather it's spoken in Mali and Mauritania), Portuguese, Italian, Swedish, and Arabic. For me, a film's story and its execution, rather than its ethnicity or shock value, count. Whether set during the last days of Stalin, at the end of World War II in Japan, in a godforsaken Austrian village, in a Danish manor house, or in a black ghetto in Washington, D.C., a film succeeds due to its handling of feelings, humor, and irony, which transcend the immediate situation, rather than to the liberal messages it purports to convey.

Woody Allen's *Celebrity* was chosen to open the festivities. (After all, we're on location, said some; he's got pull, said others.) It cleverly pokes fun at, and yet effectively depicts, the absurd situations a recently divorced couple (Kenneth Branagh—Allen's stand-in—and Judy Davis) find themselves in while moving within New York's celebrity crowd, which doesn't seem to care whether anyone's money is acquired legally or illegally, as long as he or she presents an elegant front, has had a good face lift, and is adept at clever repartee. The press conference, and even more so the actual opening, were greeted with much applause and exhaltation by spectators behind a heavy police line, and by the popping of flashbulbs. The film was promoted as a comedy but was more of a satire. Among its over five thousand actors, we recognize movie stars and the proverbial rich and famous, and some of the infamous. "Who is coming? What about Leo (Leonardo DiCaprio)? And Melanie (Griffith)?" was the buzz during the cocktail reception hosted by Grand Marnier, the underwriters of the festival. Indeed, among movies about movies, this one was among the most incisive of its genre I recall having seen.

Whether the multicultural impulse is mandated by liberalism, by genuine curiosity about the "other," or by good business sense is a moot point. However, a foreign language film, even when a running translation of the dialogue is supplied, does not necessarily give us a full understanding of the foreign culture: we are bound to miss some of the veiled symbolism. This occurred to me while I was reading the competent reviews in *The New York Times* about the films I had seen. For instance, *The Apple*, a production from Iran, elaborates on the (true) story of two nearly starving, illiterate young girls whose father keeps locking them in their house because he has been taught that he must protect their chastity (his blind wife cannot do so). It chronicles the sisters' at first tentative and increasingly inquisitive responses, and the subtle changes in their behavior, after a forward-looking social worker—who herself still wears the religious *chodar*—insists that the father abandon traditions in favor of modern tenets. This slow-moving film in a

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desolate, impoverished backwater, with its comic relief and contradictions, follows the girls from before they are able to properly walk or talk until they make friends and manage to function in their village. The story is not just a tribute to female emancipation and liberation, but to the human spirit. Although its universal message is clear, I'm sure that I missed some of the subtleties of Islamic law.

The clash in values also provides much of the amusement in *Dr. Akagi*, a film based on a novel about a doctor in a seaside village in Japan, who in 1945 is more concerned that so many of his patients are succumbing to hepatitis than about the outcome of World War II. In his passion to create a microscope powerful enough to discover the cause of hepatitis, he is helped by a wounded Dutch soldier and his devoted nurse (she sometimes earns money as a prostitute to help out her brothers). This unlikely story of a doctor constantly running from his lab to his patients, and to the military he despises but has to hoodwink, is redeemed by its astute combination of humor and suspense.

Of course, misunderstandings due to changing values are the price of progress as well as the grist for humor. In *Black Cat, White Cat*, one of the heroes, a garbage dump magnate, easily manages to outfox the other hero, the shifty Matko, who after a failed attempt to steal a train promises to have his (unwilling) son (who is in love with the sexy barmaid) marry Matko's diminutive, stubborn sister. As could be expected, in a fable where the bride escapes through a trapdoor and runs away under a hollow tree stump and then meets the man of her dreams, there is a happy ending topped by a double marriage. Yes, every coarse joke and deformity is played to the hilt in this rural backwater, where, to the accompaniment of gypsy music, no pratfall goes unnoticed. Flocks of geese as well as lonely geese abound.

In this region, as in agrarian Upper Austria where the story of *The Inheritors* is set, geese are an important staple—their feathers keep inhabitants warm during cold winters, and they not only are eaten but their abundant fat is used for frying, spreading on bread, and liver paté. This story too benefits from the splendid use of the camera that induces us to believe this utopian vision, which eventually changes the social order—even though some of the main characters end up dead. *River of Gold*, a Portuguese tale that reenacts a hundred-year-old crime of love and jealousy, is yet another improbable narrative, which its director has redeemed by his stunning takes of the landscape—including underwater scenes—and has almost rendered plausible by his versatility.

In *Khroustaliov, My Car!* humor and suspense are also entangled. The director told us at the outset that the critics in Cannes had walked out during the screening, and that in Communist times Russian films had gained their reputation by "being kept on the shelf" for at least four

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years—a luxury he no longer can afford. The actual problems of this impenetrable story have to do with the meditations of the protagonist, a Red Army general-*cum*-brain surgeon, on the tragicomic grotesqueries surrounding the final days of Stalin. The protagonist takes for granted that we know not only the details of large events, but the devious ways Russians apparently had used in order to cope, and to anticipate the various possible courses demented and scared individuals might choose to protect themselves against the corrupt system. The other, and very different, Russian production was *Strike* (1924), a celebration of the hundredth birthday of Sergei Eisenstein. (This breathtaking silent film was accompanied by the Alloy Orchestra, which played loudly enough to overpower that black-and-white masterpiece.)

Yet another black-and-white production, *The General*, is the tale of a notorious Irish thief, Martin Cahill, who plans his heists as carefully as General Douglas MacArthur mapped out his battle plans. As we watch this scoundrel develop his style, observe him get away with his two-house domestic setup with his wife and her sister, and behave as decently as a father should, we actually sympathize with the mischievous criminal. But gradually, as we see him perform ever larger misdeeds—brutally punishing one of his men who tries to steal, executing a robbery that eventually costs one hundred workers their jobs, hoodwinking the entire apparatus of the police and the museum's safety system to spirit away its most valuable paintings, whose irreplaceability he doesn't even grasp—our fondness for him diminishes.

Another movie by the same director, John Boorman, *Point Blank*, was shown to commemorate the impervious Lee Marvin, who plays an invulnerable, vengeful killer in this dazzling thriller—which allegedly was the defining film of the 1960s. Since I'm not addicted to that sort of entertainment, I couldn't understand why this production was resuscitated, unless it was designed to celebrate Marvin and to preview its imminent retake as a television series.

A black criminal who is very different from Marvin, and to me much more appealing, is Ray Joshua, the protagonist of *Slam*. Ray is a street poet who is thrown into prison for possession of marijuana. He is abused and brutally roughed up by his cellmates until, somewhat miraculously, he meets up with a creative writing teacher who recognizes his talents. Since I have read in PEN newsletters about the efforts of "Writing in Prison" for many years, I probably am less surprised at the theme of conversion through culture than most people. That the soft-spoken Ray transforms his hard-core fellow inmates by means of his rap performance poetry, however, is rather farfetched. As is the likelihood that the teacher, who in the meantime has fallen in love with him, will wait for him whatever his

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(unjust?) punishment will be. Still, if we think of the movie as the message, then why not put out an upbeat fable to its viewers—many of whom will be in black ghettos—rather than the usual picture of doom and gloom, and of defeat and separatism. Still another tale of rehabilitation, *My Name Is Joe*, recounts the life of an unemployed ex-alcoholic who is fortunate enough to fall in love with a community health worker. After Joe nearly founders because he (unsuccessfully) tries to help his best friend fight the drug cartel in order to save this friend's addicted wife, that heartbreaking story too has a relatively happy ending.

Velvet Goldmine, a film of a different stripe, celebrates gay culture and excess. It is the loudest and most frenetic spectacle I have ever sat through. The audience applauded, and no one left—were they afraid to call attention to themselves, or truly fascinated? This film, in its glitter and psychedelic colors, certainly did everything possible to shock the by now unshockable bourgeoisie—an ever more amorphous class. Although at the beginning bisexuality does occur, it is rare, as we get to see more and more orgies of fucking (this is what it always is called), sodomy, and fellatio among males. Eventually cross-dressing is so confusing that I often didn't know who was who or what was what. This supposedly was the London scene in 1970, although it couldn't possibly have been sustained at such a fast clip. Are we seeing an updated and full-blown fantasy à la Oscar Wilde? For at the end nearly everyone is either spent or gay and part of the rock scene. And unhappy as well.

In two of the features, *The Celebration* and *Happiness,* the fathers' fixations on anal intercourse with children are handled with sensitivity. Both stories deal with what, on the surface, appear to be especially successful, contented families—and end up in disaster. Whether in rural Denmark, on the east coast of the United States, or anywhere else, pederasty apparently may go unnoticed until brought out into the open, in one case by the oldest son, in the other through discovery by the police. In both instances, the contented wives' innocence functions as a sort of unknowing collusion, and we realize that these fathers love their children in spite of what they do to them and/or their friends. *Happiness* revolves around the lives of three sisters, Helen (the glamorous writer), Joy (whose every job and every romance ends in fiasco), and Trish (the contented mother whose husband, Dr. Maplewood, abuses young boys). One of Helen's timid neighbors is addicted to making obscene phone calls, another has murdered the janitor, and the sisters' parents are planning to get a divorce. All of that, as we find out at the end, causes more upset to those around them than Dr. Maplewood's child abuse. *The Celebration* reaches its climax when we find out that the sister, who has killed herself shortly before the extended family assembled for the father's sixtieth birthday, had done so when the

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nightmares about her childhood rapes began to recur. Since in both films the fathers' sexual perversions are treated with inordinate understanding and even humor, and as whodunits that gradually arrive at their climax, they are riveting.

Max Fischer (Jason Schwartzman), the protagonist of *Rushmore,* is a bespectacled know-it-all fifteen-year-old who manipulates his father, his teachers, and fellow students, and even manages to bamboozle the steel mogul and Rushmore benefactor (Bill Murray) with whom he gets embroiled in a contest for the beautiful teacher (Olivia Williams). This is a hilarious, improbable fantasy about the troubles of a talented boy who accomplishes everything he sets out to do, except pass his courses or seduce the teacher.

If last year's jury was correct in claiming that it inadvertently had chosen films about families, this year's crop actually embraces family situations, their secrets and searches, as well as friendships that substitute for the nurturing of families. For example, in *Late August, Early September,* a number of friends regroup after their ailing mutual friend Adrien (François Cluzet) has died. In this French production inflated egos and changing entanglements in love relations are juxtaposed, as the characters pursue their fairly self-centered lives. Mathieu Amalric, who plays Adrien's best but most competitive friend, is the prototype of the forty-ish man who never quite grows up. (This quality is evident as well in *The Interview,* the black-and-white short where he plays an eager young reporter whose interview with his cherished Ava Gardner ends up as a fiasco.) This French creation and, in a more sustained way, *Autumn Tale* play up the sensuous quality of the season in the lush countryside, which is particularly evocative in the fall. The story, however, deals with the soul-searching of two middle-aged friends. One of them, Isabelle (Marie Rivière), is happily married and schemes to make the other one, the divorced 45-year-old vintner, Magali (Béatrice Romand), fall for a lonely, pleasant businessman she has located by placing an ad in the personal column of the local newspaper. Complications make for suspense in this delightful and fairly pat romance.

In *The Dreamlife of Angels,* another French production, the romantic adventures of the two friends, Marie (Natacha Régnier) and Isa (Elodie Bouchez), are botched. But this primarily is a tale of the relationship that develops between two working-class kids, and their emotional lives—as they become friendly with two night club bouncers and Marie gets entangled with their young boss (Grégoire Colin), whom she meets when he saves her from being jailed by buying her the jacket she is caught stealing. This involvement ultimately engenders the rift between the two roommates, and leads Marie—who cannot extricate herself from that doomed love affair—to commit suicide. Isa, on the other hand, who is at first

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scrappy and opportunistic, and lives from hand to mouth by hustling religious pictures on the street, turns emotionally sensitive as she first wonders about, and then keeps visiting, the comatose young girl in whose apartment she lives.

This compassionate production ended this year's film festival. Most of the presentations I got to see were gratifying as entertainment, although in some instances scenes could have been shortened. Others tried too hard to get a message across, and a few shorts were rather sophomoric. As I have indicated throughout this much too brief overview, the technical aspects of these films frequently were stupendous. Ultimately, the universal messages to the audience have been most effective when the particular has come alive—whether in Iran, Italy, or Japan; in Portugal, Austria, or Denmark; in Stalin's Russia, the former Yugoslavia, or Washington's black ghetto. That is why, of course, this might have been the year that celebrated the directors. I was made aware, also, that there exists a large contingent of good young actors who have not yet attained stardom. Overt politics played almost no role at all—unless we consider the representative nature of the selections themselves as politically motivated.

COMING SOON IN PR:

- **Denis Donoghue**, "Ireland: Race, Nation, State"
- **John Patrick Diggins,** "Pragmatism for Adults"
- **Amos Oz** on Kafka and Chekhov
- **Walter Laqueur,** "The Fate of a Generation"
- **Leonard Michaels,** "Nachmann at the Races"
- **Jeffrey Herf** on the Sixties, and
- poetry from **Ted Hughes, W. S. Merwin,** and **Zbigniew Herbert**

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STEPHEN POLLARD

Letter from London

It was a beautifully British scene, and one that said almost everything about the state of a Britannia on the verge of reform. Prince Charles, head of the Church of England, sitting in the congregation at the ultra-fashionable St. John's Wood Liberal Jewish Synagogue in London. Santa Palmer-Tomkinson, the daughter of one of his best friends, had converted to Judaism in order to marry a scion of one the country's leading Jewish families, Simon Sebag-Montefiore.

For weeks the press had been led to believe that the Prince of Wales would not be on his own. Just over a year after Diana's death, and after a carefully constructed campaign designed to soften up the public to the idea of Charles and his mistress, Camilla Parker-Bowles, as a public item, this was to be their coming-out parade. But days before the wedding, the latest royal biography had appeared, with the apparently sensational revelation that Diana had made a series of hostile phone calls to Camilla, at one point even threatening to kill her.

The book was widely derided. But its author, Penny Junor, was a long-standing defender of Charles in the Chuck-and-Di media war. And it soon emerged that the Palace had seen draft chapters of this supposedly unofficial—indeed, officially frowned-upon—book. In a stroke, much of the effort to turn Charles from the publicly vilified hate figure—the man who had driven Diana to attempt suicide—back into a softer father and man of destiny was undone. The book looked like a murkier part of the same process, this time through blackening the reputation of the sainted Di. But the very reason why the wedding had seemed the perfect opportunity for a public outing—Charles and Camilla had both been invited in their own right—was now the main cause of embarrassment. One way or another, both of them would be there. And so the finest minds of the Palace's protocol department came up with a typically British compromise. Charles was to sit on his own, Camilla three rows behind.

Together, but separate—a choreographical representation of the current state of the British constitution. The monarchy, the Church of England, the House of Lords, the electoral system, Scotland, Wales—all in flux, all changing but all still clinging to their own wreckage.

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There are now two main reactions to the eighteen months of New Labour rule. The interpretation shared by the old, now disenfranchised, left of the Labour Party and by the more modish "chattering classes" is that Blair is a do-nothing prime minister of a government that is essentially a more palatable version of the Conservatives. Privatizations continue, welfare cuts remain a prime objective, inflation is still the economic public enemy number one, income tax rises are ruled out, and social policy is as far from the 1960s liberal ideal as it is possible to imagine, with the home secretary Jack Straw talking up marriage and benefit recipients ordered to take the jobs that are available on pain of sanction. The other view—shared ironically by the Conservatives and most of New Labour itself—is that it has the potential to be the most radical government Britain has had for many a year. The monarchy, the Church of England, the House of Lords, the electoral system, Scotland, Wales: every one of these is on the point of major change.

The truth is that it is both. Yes, they are on the point of such change but only on the point. Blair's baby-boomer generation, much like its American cousins, wants to be radical and came into politics to effect change. But they learned (with the New Democrats) in the 1980s that their country is deeply conservative, a nation which thinks it likes the idea of change but is swift to react against it, and will only stomach it if it is clouded in a fog of obfuscation. So the government can't quite make up its mind what to do. It grabs at big-picture changes but then backs off from the logic of its own words. Take the House of Lords. Labour's election commitment was bold and clear—abolishing the hereditary peerage, whose membership of the Upper House of Parliament is a result simply of birth. And yes, it looks as though it is honoring the pledge. But that is not enough. There is no logic—no political logic, no intellectual logic, no presentational logic—in removing the hereditaries for being undemocratic and then bedding down. Because you are left with an Upper House comprised entirely of the leftovers—the appointed Life Peers, who are ex-ministers, business leaders, and the rest of the great and the good. An appointed Upper House is, if anything, even worse. But any real reform would mean taking a risk. The logic of Lords reform points to an elected Upper House of some sort, with the argument then revolving around the structure of that election. Once you have fired the cannonball of reform then you have only a vague notion of where it will end up, and this is a government that hates taking chances.

It's the same story with voting reform. One of the linking threads of Labour in opposition was a commitment to look at Proportional Representation—a voting system that would elect a House of Commons that reflected the national vote for each party, rather than the current

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constituency-based House that can (as it did in 1997) give a party with a minority of the national vote a massive Parliamentary majority. Proportional Representation is an obsession of bookish liberals that had—has—no popular resonance. But its attractiveness to a party in opposition is obviously a lot greater than to a government with a landslide majority of 179. So it adopted a tactic beloved of the former Labour prime minister Harold Wilson, who used royal commissions to kick difficult issues into touch, on the basis that they took "a minute to set up and a decade to report." The Jenkins Commission did that job for a year, and has just reported. Roy Jenkins, *eminence grise* of liberal opinion, recommended an oh-so-British compromise, involving a Commons that would be partly constituency-based and partly drawn from national lists. But where it all goes next is anyone's guess. The only thing that is certain is that the next election—and most likely the one after that—will be fought on the traditional system.

The big one, though, is Scotland. Throughout the eighteen years of Conservative government, the Scots were effectively ruled by an alien power. Even at its most disreputable and disorganized in England, Labour remained overwhelmingly the majority party across the border. So although the push for devolution—a separate Scottish parliament with a large dose of self-government—was genuine and clear (confirmed by the 74.3 percent that voted "yes" in last year's referendum), a more subtle reading of this new Scottish nationalism is that it is at root more anti-Conservative than pro-devolution. If the UK parliament had reflected the Scottish political scene, and Labour had been in power, then the demand for devolution in the 1990s would have remained no more potent than it was during the 1970s.

But of all the constitutional reforms on which Tony Blair has now embarked—about all of which, as we have seen, he is at best ambivalent—it is Scottish devolution which bears most resemblance to the *fugu*—a Japanese fish which, unless properly cooked, causes instant death. At the moment Scotland is effectively subsidized by England—fine, in a unitary state where there is consent. One of the most likely effects of the new Scottish nationalism is the reciprocal growth of a force that has been dormant since the Act of Union in 1707: English nationalism. It will include variations on the theme of "why are we subsidising the Scots?" and is a cry that the Conservative Party, desperate for a role, and based squarely in England, will shout with relish. This is where it gets fun. The Scottish Parliament is allowed to increase income tax by a maximum of three pence in the pound, which is a total of 450 million pounds. The subsidy is about one billion pounds. Assuming that it is withdrawn, or even lessened—a big assumption, but perfectly realistic—there is a black hole of up to 550

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million pounds. The Scots are the living definition of the dependency culture, their economy supported by subsidy and their public services massaged by largesse. Take away the money and you take away the drip feed. This is the dream scenario for those who see devolution as a staging post on the way to full separation. If the Union won't allow the Scots to decide for themselves whether to increase taxes sufficiently to keep up spending levels, then there is only one way forward: independence.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to work out the attitude to that of the most symbolic of Britain's *ancien regime* institutions. For the past few years the House of Windsor has been caught in a modernizing dilemma. It knows that it needs to change if it is to stop the drip, drip, drip of contempt from poisoning the well of its popularity. Charles's treatment of the sainted Di, the Queen's inability to emote in public in the days following Diana's death, and the Duchess of York's salacious behaviour are but the three most obvious causes of the public's newly disrespectful attitude. And if Diana was indeed, in Tony Blair's phrase, the People's Princess, then her absence makes a replacement reformed People's Monarchy that much more pressing. But Labour politicians have traditionally doffed their caps to the royals with even greater gusto than Conservatives. Tony Blair's halting approach to the other constitutional reforms is revisited in his attitude to the monarchy, but with greater simplicity. He just doesn't know what to do.

Tony Blair's Labour government was elected in part because it appeared to offer Conservatism with a smiling face, and in part because of a sense that some sort of change was necessary. But in typically British fashion, the realization has never moved beyond the vague notion of "modernization"—a key Blair word that is, of course, utterly without meaning in abstract form. Blair talks in private of "the project," but beyond "modernizing the Labour Party," that is still a diffuse concept. At the moment it matters not. Blair rides high, the Conservatives are a rabble, and there is no credible opposition. But as Newton's Third Law of Motion states, every action produces an equal and opposite reaction. So we'll just have to wait and see.

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KAREN WILKIN

At the Galleries

"The Big One"—a colleague's term—of the fall season was the Jackson Pollock retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art. Proof that this was *the* show to see—or be seen at—came from the parade of international art world heavies (and the occasional movie star) at MOMA's Friday morning viewings; but apart from its chic, the Pollock show was essential because of its sheer excellence. The course of a short, intense career was presented through a thoughtfully chosen, elegantly presented selection of canvases, works on paper, prints, and a couple of sculptures—everything from laborious, essentially student efforts to gritty early works, to the astonishing, radiant poured paintings of Pollock's all-too-brief peak period (about 1947 to 1950), to the desperate struggles of his last years. It was Pollock warts and all, with full weight given to the painter at his best. Wall texts that repeated old half-truths couldn't diminish the impact of this brilliant show; neither could the hokey facsimile (*sans* floor) of the painter's Springs studio.

Pollock emerged as an unpredictable giant: a wildly uneven artist able to reach dazzling heights; a tonal master who could sometimes do remarkable things with chromatic color; a preternaturally energetic, even brutal painter capable at the same time of extraordinary delicacy and lyricism. (Substitute the word "sculptor" for "painter" and you have a good description of Pollock's contemporary, David Smith.) The late Hans Namuth's well-known films of Pollock at work, screened continuously during the exhibition, served to underscore that delicacy. Namuth's camera revealed the variety, fluency, and elegance of Pollock's gestures as he disposed paint, the *grace* with which he worked, most dramatically visible, perhaps, in his dance-like, tidy footwork, as he stepped along the length of the canvas laid out before him.

"Elegant, delicate, and fluent" seem unexpected words to apply to a painter whose myth portrays him as savage, uncontrolled, and taciturn, but tension between violence and delicacy is precisely what makes Pollock's best paintings exhilarating. Witness the Dallas Museum of Art's *Cathedral*, the Modern's *Number 1, 1948* or *Number 31, 1950*, the National Gallery's *Lavender Mist*, the Metropolitan's *Autumn Rhythm: Number 30, 1950*, or Muriel Kallis Newman's *Number 28, 1950*, deservedly celebrated

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KAREN WILKIN'S *Cézanne* is available from Abbeville Press.

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Pollack at work on *Autumn Rhythm: Number 30, 1950.* Photograph by Hans Namuth, © 1998 Hans Namuth Ltd. Courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art

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pictures that formed the heart—and high point—of the show. In these potent, wordless metaphors, Pollock's whiplash skeins and spatters, his airborne sweeps and stutters of paint create webs at once dense and diaphanous.

The best pictures breathe and pulse, either because they seem transparent or because Pollock's orchestration of color creates an unstable expanse through which fragile trails of paint thread complicated paths, shooting toward the edges of the canvas and then retreating. But Pollock's color can also be static and arbitrary; scale and rhythm can go terribly wrong. Then there is no pulse, no aerating shift between large-scale, flung drawing and small, tight incidents, only a jammed, airless accumulation. Instead of implying a vast, spreading expanse, the coiling lines of paint coalesce into a dense surface, forming an opaque, impenetrable field that makes you struggle—involuntarily—to read it as a "traditional" painted image. At MOMA, the close proximity of failed pictures, near-misses, and knock-down, drag-out triumphs made the show fascinating, instructive, and eye-testing.

Most of the earliest works, done in the mid-1930s when Pollock was barely into his twenties, betray a less-than-sensitive touch and a less-than-inspired color sense. At worst, they are amateur efforts to wrestle oil paint into submission or at least into consenting to carry emotion. At best, they are highly charged period pieces, sharply flavored with Surrealist notions of tapping the unconscious through "pure psychic automatism," overlaid with Picasso, filtered through Mexican modernism—Masson meets Siqueros. Yet even though they remind you of what just about every other ambitious American artist working at the time was doing, the raw energy and power even the most ham-fisted and predictable of Pollock's early pictures is unignorable; the young painter could create drama with a play of bright and dark across the surface of his canvas almost from the moment he began to paint seriously.

That "across the surface" is the operative phrase was confirmed by the retrospective's drawings, a small selection from the notebooks, exhibited in depth a few years ago, that document both the young painter's inventiveness and his study of old master painting. When Pollock drew from life, he had enormous difficulty translating his perceptions of mass and form into two-dimensional pictorial language, but when he drew from other art—that is, from mass and form already filtered through someone else's perceptions into two-dimensional pictorial language—he was able to give full play to his fascination with frontality and pulsing articulations, to indulge completely a taste for over-all loading that amounts to a *horror vacuui*.

By the late thirties and early forties, these characteristics dominated Pollock's work, most obviously in pictures with mythological themes that

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are at once strikingly personal and deeply indebted to Picasso, Miró, and Native American art. In these dense, brushy, symmetrically organized compositions, apparently autonomous, free-floating forms and scribbled graffiti do battle with firm architectural structure and the insistent presence of the painted surface itself. Some of these pictures are awkward, some passionate and moving. "Packed, angry, adolescent" are adjectives that come to mind, but so are "ambitious, felt, audacious." Occasionally, a passage of amazing refinement points to the new kind of virtuoso mark-making Pollock exploited once he began to pour, to draw in the air. Many of these crammed pictures are, in fact, remarkably similar in structure to the poured pictures. Pouring and spattering allowed Pollock to free his emotion-loaded gesture from the inhibiting weight of thick, recalcitrant oil paint, but the frontality and intensity of his pictures remained the same. All of which makes it sadder and odder that—at least after 1950 or so—the painter appears to have feared that his method was merely a style rather than a carrier of personality. His wildly diverse last pictures are testimony to his anguished search to escape himself.

The overlap of the Whitney's Mark Rothko retrospective (seen earlier at the National Gallery, Washington) with Pollock's reign at the Modern made for interesting comparisons. It was plain that, despite his much longer life, Rothko's best period—about 1950 to 1956 or 1957—lasted little longer than Pollock's. Rothko's earliest works—weedy, Avery-derived figures from the 1930s and spindly, biomorphic, Surrealist-inspired dreamscapes from the early 1940s—made it clear, too, that he developed far more slowly. Even by the late forties, when Pollock had hit full stride, Rothko had only just begun to paint the tentative, densely-packed color block abstractions that pre-figured his signature floating rectangles.

Which is not to devalue the wonderful years when Rothko walked a knife edge between discovery and authority, when his pictures shimmer and sing. In the most magical, the fragile layers of color seem at once ephemeral and full of human effort. The hovering blocks of luminous, unnameable hues are not only enormously satisfying as painting, but intensely evocative, so much so that the best of these pictures make Rothko's high-flown invocations of cosmic meaning seem less pretentious. But the moment, unfortunately, passed quickly. Surfaces become opaque and inert, colors lose their elusive qualities, and the pictures appear first graphic and poster-like, and finally suffocating and lifeless.

Rothko must have seen this, which must have contributed to the wrenching despair that led to his suicide, just as Pollock, in his tempestuous last years, must have known how thin and unfocused the results of his struggle to reinvent himself proved to be. Yet the legacy of these two

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troubled painters survives. I don't mean in Ross Bleckner's recent performances on the airbrush, seen simultaneously at Mary Boone, Lehmann-Maupin, and in Absolut ads; they could be described as rooted in both Pollock's idea of the all-over picture and Rothko's desire for ambiguous luminosity, but that would dignify vapid slickness with a distinguished pedigree. I mean Louise Fishman's and Joseph Marioni's fall exhibitions of paintings that affirmed the persistence of a belief in the potency of touch, the expressiveness of paint itself, the preeminence of the visual over the verbal.

Fishman's show at Cheim and Read was perhaps her strongest to date. Her earlier densely woven (sometimes literally) pictures have become looser, more sensuous, and tougher. Her recent paintings seem to evolve as you watch, through surfaces that range from transparent scrapes to fluid calligraphy. At once evocative and uncompromisingly about a particular individual's touch, these paintings appear to dissect what it means to make a non-referential picture through the act of making one.

Nothing is quite what it seems. Color appears murky and deep even when it is relatively clear and bright. You become intensely aware of process—loading, scraping, overlaying, excavating—at the same time that you become increasingly conscious of the density, instability, and individuality of the accumulated marks. Soft "blots" cancel dense ploughings; elegant swoops swim up through broad swipes; strokes fray and tatter to reveal underlying layers. There's an obsessive side to these brooding pictures, but nothing formulaic; each has a distinct mood, personality, and physical character. It was an absorbing, impressive show.

Joseph Marioni's mysterious, monochrome pictures, shown at Peter Blum, were new to me, despite his distinguished exhibition history, particularly in Europe. (I am indebted to the former director of the Rose Art Museum, Carl Belz, for correcting my ignorance.) Marioni's profound concern with particular expanses of particular densities of particular colors results in confrontational but insubstantial cascades of relentless, saturated single hues, impossibly slowed in their descent. You read across and into the sheets of color, but you can't quite trust your perceptions, since the subtle inflections created by repeated thin applications of paint disappear when you come close, leaving only the brute fact of—paradoxically—translucent pigment on a surface. In your effort to understand what you are seeing, you seize on the smallest rivulet, the least waver in density. The sense of layering and of the glacial descent of a liquid mass of paint, in fact, is implied chiefly by the way color frays and puddles at the bottom (or, more rarely, the sides) of the canvas.

Despite their literal thinness, Marioni's most arresting pictures appear, as a painter friend noted, to be "fat," that is, to be about the material presence

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of paint. I often responded most strongly to pictures with relatively narrow formats, probably because verticality, implying the pull of gravity on paint, intensifies the physicality of the medium, but there were exceptions. Marioni's dark pictures seemed the most resonant, especially a dull gray (squarish) canvas that heated up as you watched. Again, there were exceptions: a small, smoldering red picture and a large glowing golden canvas, like a thundering waterfall of molten citrus. But all the pictures in this wonderful show were notable for their powerful presence, their sense of immanence and *gravitas.*

What further distinguishes—and unites—Fishman and Marioni is their implicit assumption that the wordless language of "unmediated," whole-hearted painting remains eloquent, flexible, and provocative, the current taste for alternative media and text-based work notwithstanding. In some circles, this position is regarded as tenable only by cultural dinosaurs, but it's increasingly clear that many serious, ambitious, *younger* artists share this belief. Witness Suzanne McClelland's recent show, "mothertongues" at Paul Kasmin. Apparently provoked by the artist's ruminations on travel, distance, and the difficulties of communication, the exuberant canvases and fresh, direct works on paper had as much to do with painting languages as with verbal ones. One of McClelland's strengths is her ability to produce a remarkable range of expressive, vigorous, often extremely delicate marks. In her recent pictures, she contradicts that gift with bold, raw strokings, emblematic repetitions, and cryptic messages. The largest and possibly the best painting in the show, an ample expanse dominated by a cheerful, smudgy pink, flirted with spatial allusion and then canceled it with a self-deprecating "ENOUGH," written both forward and backward. At first, McClelland's new works seem uninhibited, energetic and high-spirited, but they gradually reveal themselves as "darker"—brash, but a little anxious, rather than wholly benign, which is what keeps you thinking about them.

Some of the power of John Gibson's new paintings at Wendy S. Hoff Fine Arts derives, similarly, from their addressing issues quite different from what they initially appear to be about. Gibson has, Morandi-like, staked out a deliberately circumscribed territory: a universe populated exclusively by monumental, often fantastically patterned spheres, sometimes presented singly, sometimes paired, sometimes piled in (as it turns out) impossible constructions. Gibson convinces you, at first, of the accuracy of his perceptions and the fidelity with which he transcribes them, but his uncanny images soon move into another realm. Dry, scraped paint layers and incised drawing pull you to the surface. Undisguised additions to the canvas sharpen your awareness of the shape of the picture and the proportion of sphere to field.

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Gibson's convincing illusionism evaporates as you look. The play of light and dark quickly declares itself to have nothing to do with modelling form or indicating a light source. A pair of striped spheres, instead of remaining side by side on a horizontal plane, begin to carve out separate, irreconcilable positions in non-space. The artifice of art declares itself. Pictures that seemed, at first sight, to be about representing the world prove to be wholly about the act of making a picture and the materials with which it is made.

Gibson's paintings are deeply informed by past traditions of Western painting, but ultimately, their homage to the past—their meticulousness, luminosity, and modulated hues—is far less significant than their unabashed modernism. Gibson's subversion of tradition by shifting emphasis from illusionism to physicality, from the perceived to the irrational, makes his works mysterious and memorable.

That last sentence could also be applied, despite fundamentally differing premises, to Patrick Ireland's *Entrance to the Garden of Earthly Delights*, the latest in his series of room-sized painting-drawing-sculptures, installed at Charles Cowles this fall. The piece expanded Ireland's on-going exploration (or "dissection") of ways of diagramming space. As in his earlier constructions, you were allowed to penetrate a room whose walls were painted with schematic "architecture." Rather than being encouraged to see *into* these fictive spaces, you were thrust out of them by a cat's cradle of stretched cords that projected the trajectories of the paintings' illusionary structures and pulled their vanishing points into the viewer's space, turning conventions of perspectival representation inside out. Ireland's odd color—purple, peach, light blue, and yellow green, perched somewhere between sweetness and acidity—heightened the sense of disequilibrium by being both appealing and slightly abrasive.

In past installations, Ireland directed you to a center vantage point from which the airborne drawing lined up with the painted divisions (the equivalent of floor patterns in Baroque churches marking the spot from which painted *inquadratura* looks like real architecture); here he encouraged you to wander, to promenade in the "aisle" between the plunging cords and painted walls, to discover the multiple, unstable alignments made possible by his complex three-dimensional drawing. You became aware of asymmetries and warpages, unforeseen densities and transparencies, breaks in the color of stretched lines, surprising curves and color shifts. Clearly, Ireland's conception of "earthly delight" embraces not only sensual pleasure, but considerable intellectual stimulation as well.

A similar discussion of "body-ness" and "mind-ness" informed Mia Westerlund Roosen's recent sculptures at Lennon-Weinberg. An extension of her continuing preoccupation with breaking spatial boundaries, they

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Pulse (1997) by Mia Westerlund Roosen. Fabric and resin. 12½ feet by 69 feet. Courtesy of Lennon, Weinberg, Inc.

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included intimately scaled, pale "leaves"—sheet-like forms that she has explored in concrete and resin over the past few years—inserted loosely and apparently disappearing into floor-level slots in the wall. (Feminist critics and Freudians alike could do a lot with these.) Most effective was a folded slab, slightly darkened in the "interior," tucked into its slot to become an ambiguous object/place loaded with associations ranging from anatomy to geography to sacred architecture. A selection of Westerlund Roosen's urgent drawings gave clues to the evolution of these sculptures.

The main event was a parade of narrow, molded "columns" of resin-soaked flannel, seemingly slicing through the gallery's longest wall at irregular intervals. Their confrontational verticality evoked the figure, but that was immediately neutralized by repetition. As you moved along the piece, an insistent, syncopated rhythm made itself felt, while the individuality of each "column"—differences of color, surface, inflection, and apparently translucency—became increasingly evident. At once body-like and architectural, fleshy and fabric-like, soft and brittle, the slender "pleats" fused Westerlund Roosen's ongoing fascination with skin, both as metaphor and as physiology, with her wholly sculptural sense of structure. Even the way the long, vertical resin elements emerged from their slits, dragging the edges forward, turned the wall itself into a kind of skin, a layer that could be peeled off.

Obviously, the contrast between pristine (if sliced) white wall and rosy "pleats" was important, but I kept thinking about the exhibition's announcement card, which showed the piece within the walls of a barn at the artist's upstate New York property. The dialogue between expressive, fleshy, *made* forms and the linear geometry of the building was suggestive and made me wonder how her future pieces would deal with this conversation between container and contained.

And for sheer delight, this fall, it was hard to beat (once again) the exhibition at C&M Arts, an impeccably chosen survey of Matisse's sculpture that, as previous shows at the gallery have led us to expect, ranged from the archetypal to the surprising. It was alone worth a visit to see the three incarnations of the spiraling standing figure, *Madeleine* (1901 and 1903): two closely related sculptures, familiar from their appearance in Matisse's paintings, differentiated mainly by the divergent nature of bronze and plaster, and a third, more articulated, vigorously inflected version that evoked the tradition of Mannerist bronzes more than of early twentieth-century modernism. I have a special weakness for the robust, arching *Nu assis, bras derrière le dos* (1909), but it was impossible to ignore any of the wonderful sculptures in this splendid little show.

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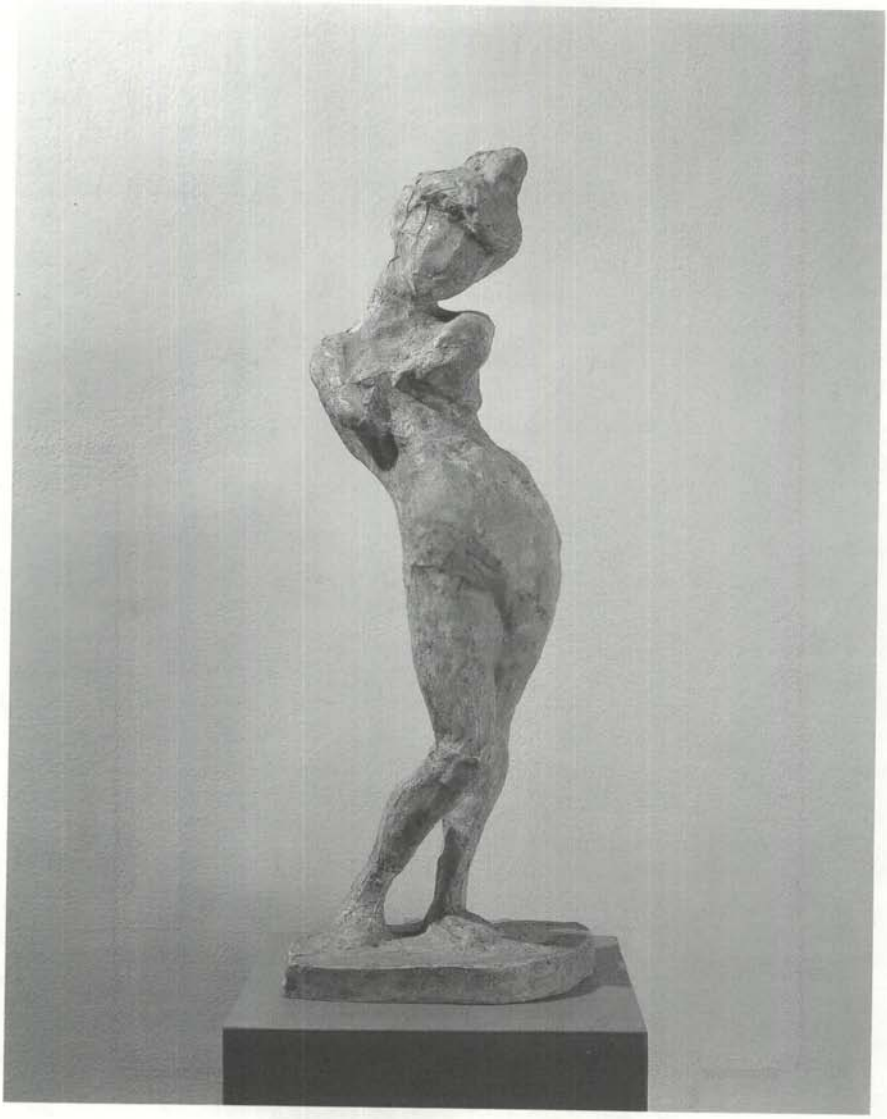

Madeline I (1903) by Henri Matisse. Plaster. 23⅝ inches by inches by 6 inches. Courtesy of C&M Arts.

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POEMS

HENRI COLE

Folly

In the Doria Pamphili garden,
most of the granite niches are empty,
the male gods have lost their genitals,
and the Great Mother, Hera, has no head.

Something has gone awry
in the artificial lake.
Burrowing deep into the black banks
enclosed by wire mesh,
families of nutria are eradicating—
with webbed hind feet,
blunt muzzled heads
and long orange incisors—
Pope Innocent X's pleasure garden's
eco-system.

Gothic as the unconscious,
the heavy tapered bodies
root along the irrigation ditches,
making their way in a criminal trot
toward the swans, whose handsome,
ecclesiastical wings open out
obliviously.

Each day I come back.
The sky is Della Robbia blue.
As I rise to my feet,
a swan—immaculate
and self-possessed as the ambulance
bearing my half-dead Mother—
grasps into the depths

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and tears a weed up,
dripping like a chandelier,
while paddling behind are the derelict rodents,
hankering—with big sleepy eyes,
suggesting something like matrimonial bliss,
and plush gray fur,
undulating like the coat my mother wore—
to hunt the grass-shrouded
cygnet eggs and gut
their bloody embryos.

CAROLINE SANDERSON

A Colorist

My friend who sees everything
in black and white,
naturally dislikes shades of gray.
The color of compromise, gray,
she would say and be mean about it -
a color in which to hide hope.
But when it is quiet, not every
conversation can be in black and white -
there was Picasso in Paris,
nineteen-forty-two, forty-three
(and worse) -
casually failing his friend,
his friend who was a Jew.
Had he never seen a dove
dodge a hunter's madness?
Had he ever seen Proust become
frightened of lilac?
I think we'd better leave him in Paris
in nineteen-forty-two,
better leave Picasso there.
Probably sleeping well
and worshipped (so they say) so well.

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Music Lesson

How silly (I thought) when I read that line,
that every woman adores a fascist,
and how easy it was to underestimate you.
You're as smooth as a Nazi,
not any old train proudly running on time
but those special trains, well sealed,
ready for the cruelest run.
Politely you observe
cause, effect and death
hiding in that uniform known as
'problems of my own' -
a bottle-green quiet made for the SS
as they went on their rounds
picking off *untermenschen*.
And after the quiet they liked music,
Beethoven, Brahms, Schubert -
romantic celebrants those Nazis
at the end of a day's work.
You like music, very much, and art
all the right interests
that (unlike the lie)
never stopped anyone being a brute,
which makes me feel used, in a way,
and sadly seduced -
liking Beethoven, Brahms and Schubert
as much as you.

The Visible Man by **HENRI COLE** was recently published by Alfred A. Knopf.
CAROLINE SANDERSON lives in England.

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BOOKS

THE FOUNDING MYTHS OF ISRAEL. By Ze'ev Sternhell. Princeton University Press. $28.95

Most Israeli intellectuals loathe the government in power, which, as they see it, may well lead their country towards ruin—with the ultra orthodox undermining the democratic and liberal character of the country and with a general decline in public spirit and morality. Thus some of them look back in anger, trying to find out what went wrong in the past and why. Their search for culprits can be found in the work of novelists, playwrights, historians, and political scientists.

The work of Ze'ev Sternhell, Leon Blum Professor at the Hebrew University, on the history of modern France and fascism in general is well known and respected. Over the last decade he has immersed himself in the history of the Zionist labor movement. His book, while not incorrect inasmuch as the facts are concerned, leads to conclusions that are either obvious and have never been in dispute, or are curiously lopsided. I write this with regret because I share many of the underlying concerns of this book and its apprehensions with regard to the future. One of Sternhell's obvious conclusions is the fact that, like the Russian socialist movement from which it sprang, Labor Zionism was not predominantly Marxist and internationalist and that the nationalist, or rather patriotic, motivation played a crucial role. Their thought, Sternhell says, was shallow and their perspective narrow and they cared little, if at all, about ideology. They were provincial, the products of the little townships of Poland and Russia, huddled around their synagogues and rabbinical schools.

One of the main thinkers of the Labor movement, Berl Katznelson, met Rudolf Hilferding in Switzerland in 1937, and Sternhell notes (as an example of Katznelson's ideological ignorance) that he had never read Hilferding's *Finanzkapital,* one of the seminal works in socialist thought, adding that "it is doubtful whether any leader of the Socialist movement in Europe had not read this great book." But the book had been written in 1910; by 1937 it was no longer of any relevance. It is doubtful whether anyone in the British Labour party had ever read it, or anyone in France except Jaures (who knew German). And of what possible significance was this book for the Palestinian Labor party in 1937? I mention this incident in passing because it is typical of the broad generalizations in this book.

WALTER LAQUEUR is the author of *A History of Zionism* (Schocken Books). **CUSHING STROUT**'s latest book is *Making American Tradition*, published by Rutgers University Press. **JENNY TEICHMAN** has written several books, including *Polemical Papers* (Ashgate).

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True, the Labor Zionists were provincial by background and education, but then they had not been able to choose their place of birth and, unlike Leon Blum, they did not have the good fortune to attend the École Normale Supérieur. True, Labor Zionism in its majority was not Marxist, but the same is true for almost every European socialist movement. True, the national element was strong, but Sternhell, a historian of modern France, hardly needs to be reminded of the strong patriotic element in the French Left beginning with the Jacobins and continuing through the war in Algeria and beyond.

All this might be regrettable, but how could it be different in the case of a social democratic party in a small country still in the process of being built up? How to conduct the class struggle in a society that does not yet have real classes? How much help could Labor Zionism have given to republican Spain, given that the outbreak of the civil war coincided with the outbreak of the civil war in Palestine (the riots of 1936-39)? How can one reasonably expect a more negative attitude towards capital investments in Palestine in the twenties and thirties if such capital was desperately needed for building up the country in a race against time? True, the rhetoric could have been more revolutionary (and this was true of the left wing) but what difference would it have made?

Sternhell, in his anger, states more than once that there was really no difference between the Left and the Right among the Zionists in Palestine: "Socialist Zionism remained as it had been: radical, tribal, *voelkisch,* steeped in the cult of the heroic past and convinced of the justice of its claims to the entirety of the ancient land which was formerly the scene of national independence and greatness. This nationalism, together with its symbols had always been a common enterprise of the Left and the Right. . . .The two forms of Zionism differed only in their methods." But in fact they differed in quite a few things; otherwise Rabin would still be alive.

If socialism is defined mainly by Marxist literacy and attachment to the Marxist canons, Labor Zionism does not score highly in retrospect. But instinctive socialists produced the *Kibbutz,* the *Kvutza,* and the *Moshav,* and pioneers left the *shtetl* for a life of hardship; they could have gone, after all, as many of their contemporaries did, to the United States or South Africa and a better life. These achievements of Labor Zionism were not just a "founding myth."

Sternhell tends to rewrite history in much too sweeping a way and this is aggravated by the fact that he writes more often than not about people whom he did not know and whose stories cannot be reconstructed in full on the basis of the archives. He complains about the differentials

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in income and standard of living between leaders and ordinary party members.

Ben Gurion, he reports, had a four-room apartment and bought far too many books, so that he owed his party in the end £283. Among many other details about the income of leaders, the special bonuses and so on, he notes that Elijahu Golomb, head of the Hagana, received £13 a month in 1930 and £26 in 1936, David Remes and Yosef Sprinzak (he notes with evident disapproval) received a representational allowance of £3 a month, approximately twelve dollars.

Having been at one time or another to the homes of some of those mentioned in this book, I can assure Professor Sternhell that they lived very modestly by any standards; some of them indeed lived shabbily, as noted by foreign visitors. Marx had greater debts than Ben Gurion and Leon Blum bought more books. As for Engels, half a dozen of the leaders of Labor Zionism could have been housed in his villa in Manchester. Until about ten or twenty years ago ostentatious consumption and luxury were not acceptable in the political classes of Palestine and later Israel (and this, to be fair, was true also with regard to Begin and Shamir). These leaders, after all, had to entertain at home and travel abroad, they had to meet the High Commissioner of Palestine and visiting dignitaries; they could not appear on these occasions with holes in their trousers (even though some of them did). In brief, Sternhell is applying impossibly high standards to Labor Zionism, not just in comparison with the life style of a Brezhnev but with any other known social democratic party in the world.

Yes, but what of the next generation of leaders of Labor Zionism from Yigal Alon and Moshe Dayan to Shimon Peres and Ehud Barak, to what degree can they still be considered class-conscious socialists? True enough, and what about Tony Blair and Gerhard Schroeder and the snows of yesteryear? The main issue in Israel is now peace or war and not the class struggle, a fact accepted by Sternhell towards the end of his book. And it is true that Labor Zionism, which was in power during the Six Days War and after, bears a great deal of responsibility for the opportunities that might have been missed after 1967. But this has mainly to do with the lack of foresight and statesmanlike qualities of the then leadership, with their weakness rather than their chauvinism, and very little with the excessive book purchases by Ben Gurion and the twelve-dollar representational bonus received by Josef Sprinzak in the 1920s.

WALTER LAQUEUR

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NOT LIKE US: HOW EUROPEANS HAVE LOVED, HATED, AND TRANSFORMED AMERICAN CULTURE SINCE WORLD WAR II. By Richard Pells. Basic Books. $30.00

In 1947 Philip Rahv's anthology, *Discovery Of Europe: The Story of American Experience in the Old World*, was highly appropriate to its historical postwar moment. Rahv saw the recent war as having "put an end to the theory and practice of expatriation." (Richard Wright and James Baldwin would be exceptions.) He looked forward toward "a new unity of loyalties and values, and of political and economic institutions" that would use all the resources of Western civilization, in which our share "now fully equals that of the European" and in which we would need "to assume the responsibilities that go with an equal partnership." He spoke for what many of us in my generation of returned soldiers felt about the time in which we were living.

He was primarily interested in how his story illuminated American character, and it is now common for historians to complain that such an interest blandly ignores differences and conflicts. But if Rahv knew that Europe was both myth and reality, he also knew that Americans reacted to it with "sharp differences among themselves," involving "their deepest commitments to their country and sense of participation in the national fate." No single formula could do justice to "the complexity of 'Europe' as an idea in the American mind," for the relation was one of "combined attraction and repulsion." There were "passionate pilgrims," as Henry James called them, as well as passionate isolationists.

Rahv's categories apply to my own *The American Image of the Old World*, which focuses on both literary and diplomatic history and shares Daniel J. Boorstin's conclusion in 1956 that history had "disintegrated the image of a 'Europe' which was a mere foil for the image of ourselves." I wanted to emphasize that, as allies in a common cause, Americans and Europeans could find their own identities without exaggerating their differences. In 1967, as a Fulbright Fellow in Rome, I was struck by one of Henry James's prefaces in which he called for a new and more subtle international novel. Instead of the usual contrast between "fishes and fowls," there would be "the interest and the tension of disparity where a certain parity may have been in question." I think James would have seen his point illustrated in some of Bernard Malamud's wry stories of Americans in Italy.

Richard Pells does not mention these precursors, but the territory of *Not Like Us* is the scene that James imagined. Pells first saw Europe in 1979 as a Fulbright Fellow in Amsterdam, and he would like to put behind us the metaphors for both "America" and "Europe" because, in his view, the conversation between them from the beginning has been too much conducted in terms of "melodrama." His taste and talent are for putting discussion of

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the cultural relations between America and Europe on more literal empirical ground, as marked out by a knowledgeable and fair-minded historian.

He is concerned with their relationship from the time of the 1920s, when American business, tourism, jazz, and movies became formidable influences in Europe. He moves on to the work of the OWI in cultural diplomacy, the subsidizing by the Rockefeller Foundation of intellectual émigrés to America, the institutionalization in the U.S.I.A. of the "symbiotic relationship between American culture and American foreign policy" during the Cold War, and the creation of Fulbright Fellowships in a time of reversal, when America became an "embodiment of the cosmopolitan ideal" and Europe fell into the role of being "hopelessly provincial." (Pells's formulation reveals the persistence of the polarizing habit even in a sober demythologizer.)

Pells has a double focus, writing many informative pages about the growth of the American Studies movement in Europe and many more about the influence in Europe of American popular entertainment, which is excoriated by European intellectuals and eagerly consumed by ordinary Europeans. It has for long been a familiar point that the anguish of Europeans about modernization in their own countries is often displaced onto "Americanization," as in Georges Duhamel's *America the Menace: Scenes from the Life of the Future* (1931). Pells illustrates the theme in many ways, but the more novel part of his argument is that Europe has been able to resist, modify, and adapt this "Americanization" in accordance with its own interests. He makes a good case with education in postwar Germany, but when American businessmen tailor their products for commercial reasons to European tastes, as he shows that they do, who has really done the adapting?

Pells also charts the course of American receptivity to European intellectuals: the important impact of the émigrés in the thirties and forties on American universities, the influence of British rock music and "blockbuster" musical comedies since the sixties; and the American academic fascination (even infatuation) with French structuralism, deconstruction, and postmodernism in the seventies and eighties. Pells has a nice sense of irony about American academia in which "a bunch of not-yet-dead white European males could even be deployed in an assault on the bastions of 'Eurocentrism' itself." He is well aware that a new generation of writers in France have become much less skeptical than their "anti-humanist" predecessors about rationality, objectivity, and liberal democratic institutions. If American academics remain largely unaware of them, European audiences "remained enthralled" by reruns of American TV shows that no longer appear on American screens.

Pells foresees a new double identity of "dual allegiances": one to local and national traditions, the other to "an international culture and a global

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economy." Maybe so, but the persistence of "identity politics" with its restrictive ethnic and sexual definitions favors narrower forms of belonging. Pells's book has its own dual identity problem, for he has to move back and forth between references to intellectuals and mass culture, from analyzing Mary McCarthy's Italy and Saul Bellow's Paris to analyzing McDonald's in Paris and *Dallas* in Denmark—a very different kettle of fish.

Pells sensibly concedes that "sometimes a movie is just a movie and a cheeseburger is just a cheeseburger." Too often, however, we are asked to take mass culture as seriously as the number of pages it takes up in his book, as if the meaning of *Dallas* to Danish women (five pages) is really an important question. (It turns out they see something "universal" in the schlock.) Because Europeans are exercising their "democratic privilege" in consuming mass culture, I think Pells tends to minimize the extent to which even trenchant critics of facile anti-Americanism, as Raymond Aron was, were justifiably worried about the debasing effects of mass culture's music, films, and television. Choosing the meretricious does not change its nature, though it may change ours.

The tone of his book is mostly detached and omniscient, but at one point his own Fulbright experience comes through and makes me nod in personal recognition. Writing about American students and professors in Europe, he notes that "nothing seemed familiar. You had to learn how the banks and the post office worked," among many other practical matters. You become defensive about European diatribes about America and feel nostalgic for your own country. Living in Europe is "an occasion for introspection, an opportunity not only to explore another country and another culture but to rediscover America." You learn "something important about yourself: both how much and how little you could adapt to a culture that, for all its attractions and similar preoccupations, was fundamentally different from your own." Well said, and a story as old as Jefferson, Hawthorne, and William James.

CUSHING STROUT

THE LAST WORD. By Thomas Nagel. Oxford University Press. $19.95

In *The Last Word* Thomas Nagel sets out to rebut contemporary attacks on truth, reason, and objectivity. He agrees that those attacks are generally self-refuting but he wants to say something more than that, something new. He uses the terms "subjectivism" and "relativism" to denote global skepticism, which, as he rightly remarks, should be distinguished from restricted forms such as Hume's epistemology and the emotive theory of ethics. He also

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notes that subjectivism and relativism "have a self-evident air if not examined too closely, which may account for their greater popularity outside philosophy than inside it."

Although relativism is very ancient it can be interesting and useful to locate the causes of its repeated re-emergences. Nagel quotes Hilary Putnam's remark about "the appeal which all incoherent ideas seem to have," but makes no attempt to explain either their origins or their appeal. If we look around, though, we can sometimes locate the (re-)emergence of relativism in the teachings of individual philosophers—Protagoras, for example, or Nietzsche, or, in Oxford, J. L. Mackie, author of *Inventing Right and Wrong.* Relativism speaks of hidden agendas, so Freud too has had a finger in this pie. Roger Kimball, in *Tenured Radicals,* argues that the popularity in America of global relativism can be traced to the arrival in 1947 of Paul de Man, a Nazi collaborator with plenty to hide. The notion that objective knowledge is impossible everywhere (and especially in ethics) was consciously or unconsciously adopted by de Man as a smokescreen for his early life as an anti-Semite, a smokescreen enthusiastically taken up by his supporters in the U. S. and France. The smokescreen worked, and works, like a charm.

Tracing the origin of ideas, be they coherent or incoherent, is a task for historians of philosophy, and, as I've already said, it is both useful and interesting. But it is not the same thing as examining the validity or otherwise of arguments and not the same thing as showing that a theory is true (or false). To confuse or meld those two different enterprises is part and parcel of relativism itself.

Contemporary global skepticism consists of claims that history, biology, or psychology can explain away, i.e., replace, the concepts of reason, truth, and validity. Nagel's first major contention is that those claims themselves rely on the concepts they pretend to abolish, and are therefore self-refuting. His second contention is that what he calls "first order arguments" in logic, science, and ethics can refute the meta-language explanations of relativism, which thus turn out to be refuted twice over. As far as I know this second contention is new.

Relativists rely on all-purpose comments about reason in general and reply to criticism by repeating their comments.

In discussion the objectivist finds that his opponent will either refuse to accept the concept of refutation, or, if a follower of Jacques Derrida, will claim that self-refutation merely shows language to be resting on quicksand.

Nagel deals with the impasse by moving from generality to particularity. It is legitimate to treat the relativist's all-purpose comments as comprising a collection of assertions about the supposed origins of every different domain of reason: logic, science, ethics, history, etc. The objectivist

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can then show that the particular methods internal to the various domains have in each case an authority that is inexhaustible. Now, an inexhaustible authority cannot be completely explained away. An inexhaustible authority cannot undergo reduction without remainder to a causal story about biology or social conditioning or whatever. Firstly, because the authority of reason applies to the reductive analyses themselves, that is to say, the analyses can only show themselves to be correct by appealing to logic, or to empirical evidence, or to scientific theory. This is especially obvious when reductive analyses compete with each other; it would not be possible to adjudicate between biological and sociological explanations, for instance, if reason had no independent force. Global relativism claims that reason is nothing over and above a natural fact about human beings but natural facts cannot have authority, least of all inexhaustible authority. Natural facts are just there. You might as well say that the rockiness of a rock or the strawness of straw has authority.

Having explained his general strategy, Nagel goes on to discuss the nature of language and to demonstrate the authority of the internal methods of logic, mathematics, science, and ethics. He is extremely successful in the case of logic and mathematics, less sure-footed on science, and stumbles once or twice when coping with ethics.

Nagel acknowledges that the authority of moral reasoning has always seemed less secure than that of logic and mathematics. But he rightly points out that human beings cannot escape the need to decide how to act any more than we can escape decisions about what to believe. To my mind, though, the inescapable need to make decisions about what to do does not by itself imply that the methods of ethics have inexhaustible authority.

Nagel's defense of moral reasoning consists largely in a reprise of arguments taken from an earlier book, *The Possibility of Altruism,* and like those it combines an assumption that the demands of a prudent ego are self-evidently rational with the assertion that all reasons are universal in scope "by definition." Even if he is right, there remains a question about whether the two supposedly necessary truths can be brought together in such a way as to motivate action. And as it happens neither the definition nor the assumption of self-evidence seems to be absolutely unavoidable. When I quizzed my students about the matter most of the men agreed that the rationality of prudence is self-evident and most of the women said it is not. There isn't any way to convince a student that he or she is wrong on this point. One might try the Bloomsbury ploy described by J. M. Keynes: "Oh! (sneer) So you think that, do you?" but that ploy doesn't always work. Surely the lesson, then, is that Nagel's assumption is attractive to some and not to others (a matter of temperament), and that it is not self-evident.

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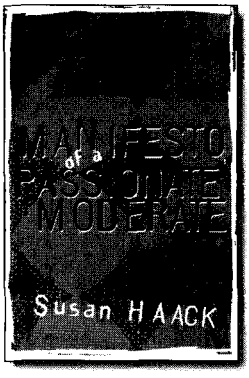
A second edition would be improved by a few minor terminological clarifications. For example, Nagel uses the term "internal" inconsistently; in the main he means internal to a domain of reasoning but occasionally he describes subjective attitudes as "inner" and inner surely means the same as internal. This double use might confuse some readers. Another example: the word "rationalization" appears quite often but is never defined, which wouldn't matter if Nagel were right to assume that a local (Viennese, U. S. East Coast), technical (psychoanalytical) sense would be perspicuous to every reader. A possible definition here might be: "the process of hiding irrational or unworthy wishes behind a facade of non-genuine reasons," a sense of the word which is well understood by many middle-aged and elderly academics, but one can't be so sure about students and other youngish readers. Still, these linguistic points are mere niggles. *The Last Word* can be strongly recommended as an accessible, well-written, and sometimes inspired demolition of an unfortunate and unprepossessing philosophical and cultural phenomenon.

JENNY TEICHMAN

"Is it possible for a philosopher to have a wicked wit, a kindly heart, a passion for clarity, and an utterly convincing argument that crossword puzzles are, for thinkers, what labs are for scientists? It is, if her name is Susan Haack."
—Robert Heilbroner, author of *The Worldly Philosophers*



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Who Killed Homer?

by Victor Davis Hanson and John Heath

A Forum on the State of Humanities and the Classics Today

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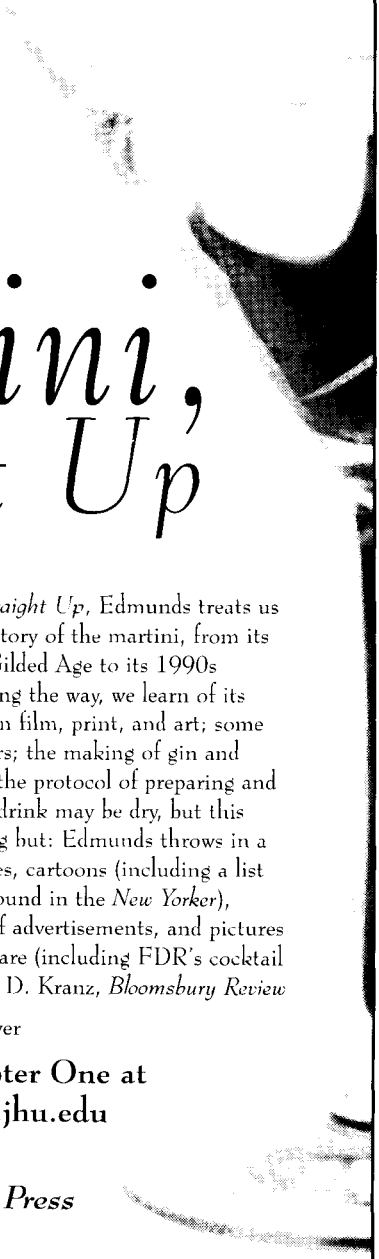

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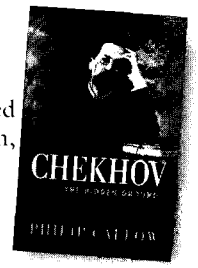

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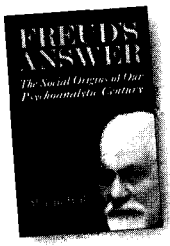

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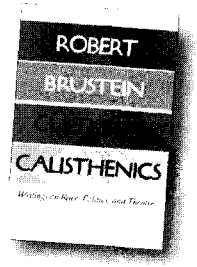

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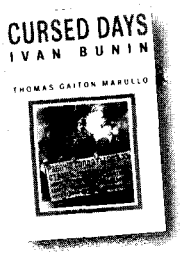

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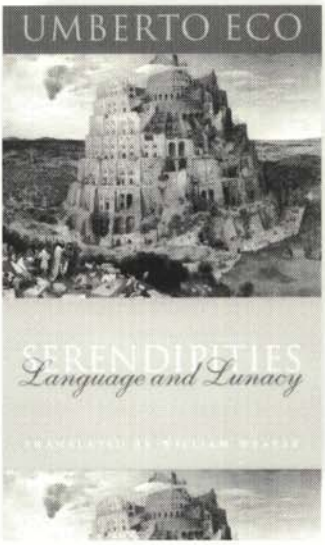

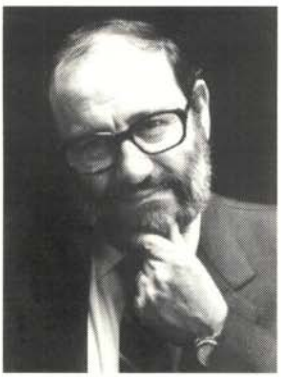

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